

# Galatians 4 Commentary

Galatians 3

Galatians 5

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Magna Carta of Spiritual Emancipation  
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See Also:

[Paul's First Missionary Journey](#)

[Paul's Second Missionary Journey](#)

[Paul's Third Missionary Journey](#)

## SUMMARY CHART: EPISTLE TO THE GALATIANS

Gospel of Grace Defended		Gospel of Grace Explained			Gospel of Grace Applied		
Defense of the Gospel Gal 1:1-2:21		Freedom from Legalism Gal 3:1-4:31			Freedom to Love and to Serve Gal 5:1-6:18		
Labor		Liberty			Life		
Authority Not Opinion		Freedom Not Bondage			Spirit Not Flesh		
Personal Autobiography		Doctrinal Accuracy			Practical Application		
Paul the Apostle (Gal 1:1-24)	Paul's Authority (Gal 2:1-21)	Justified by Faith not Works (Gal 3:1-9)	Justified by Faith not the Law (Gal 3:10-4:20)	Grace and Law Cannot Co-Exist (Gal 4:21-31)	Position and Practice of Liberty (Gal 5:1-15)	Power of Liberty (Gal 5:16-26)	Performance in Liberty (Gal 6:1-18)
Vindication		Exposition			Application		
Testimonial and Apologetic		Doctrinal and Argumentative			Practical and Hortatory		
Biographical Explanation		Doctrinal Exposition			Practical Exhortation		
Authentication of Liberty		Argumentation for Liberty			Application of Liberty		

**Style or Tone:** Vigorous, blunt, aggressive, direct, corrective, urgent, brief, righteous anger, strong words

**Theme:** Justification by Faith and not by Works of the Law

**Author:** Paul in large letters (Gal 6:11)

**Recipients:** Churches in Galatia (Gal 1:2) (Most likely the Southern Region)

**Christ in Galatians:** Jesus is the Source and Power for the believer's New Life. (Gal 2:20, 5:16)

### CONTRAST OF GRACE AND LAW

LAW	GRACE
The law prohibits	Grace invites and gives
The law condemns the sinner	Grace redeems the sinner.
The law says DO	Grace says IT IS DONE.
The law says, Continue to be holy	Grace says, It is finished.
The law curses	Grace blesses
The law slays the sinner	Grace makes the sinner alive.

The law shuts every mouth before God	Grace opens the mouth to praise God.
The law condemns the best man	Grace saves the worst man.
The law says, pay what you owe	Grace says, I freely forgive you all.
The law says "the wages of sin is death"	Grace says, "the gift of God is eternal life."
The law says, "the soul that sins shall die"	Grace says, Believe and live.
The law reveals sin	Grace atones for sin.
By the law is the knowledge of sin	By grace is redemption from sin.
The law was given by Moses	Grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.
The law demands obedience	Grace bestows and gives power to obey.
The law was written on stone	Grace is written on the tables of the heart.
The law was done away in Christ	Grace abides forever.
The law puts us under bondage	Grace sets us in the liberty of the sons of God.

**Related Resource:** Purpose of the Law

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**An Outline of Galatians - D Edmond Hiebert** (See context in [An Introduction to the New Testament, Volume 2](#))

THE INTRODUCTION (Galatians 1:1-10)

1. The salutation (Galatians 1:1-5)
  - a. The writer (Galatians 1:1-2a)
    - i. Paul, the Apostle (Galatians 1: 1)
    - ii. The brethren with him (Galatians 1:2a)
  - b. The readers (Galatians 1:2b)
  - c. The greeting (Galatians 1:3-5)
    - i. The contents of the greeting (Galatians 1:3a)
    - ii. The source of the grace and peace (Galatians 1:3b-4)
    - iii. The doxology (Galatians 1:5)
2. The rebuke (Galatians 1:6-10)
  - a. His astonishment at their fickleness (Galatians 1:6-7)
    - i. The reason for the astonishment (Galatians 1:6)
    - ii. The explanation of the departure (Galatians 1:7)
  - b. His assertion about its seriousness Galatians 1:8-9)
    - i. The seriousness asserted (Galatians 1:8)
    - ii. The seriousness reaffirmed (Galatians 1:9)
  - c. His attitude in the matter (Galatians 1:10)

I. PERSONAL: THE VINDICATION OF HIS APOSTOLIC AUTHORITY (Galatians 1:11-2:21)

1. How he got his Gospel (Galatians 1:11-24)
  - a. The origin of his Gospel through revelation (Galatians 1: 11-12)
    - i. The assertion as to its nature (Galatians 1:11)
    - ii. The manner of its reception (Galatians 1:12)
  - b. The previous conduct of the one given the revelation (Galatians 1:13-14)
    - i. The manner of his former life known to them Galatians 1:13a)
    - ii. The description of his former life (Galatians 1:13b-14)
      - a. In relation to the Church of God (Galatians 1:13b)
      - b. In relation to Judaism (Galatians 1:14)
  - c. The description of the revelation received (Galatians 1:15-17)
    - i. The source of the revelation (Galatians 1:15)

- ii. The subject of the revelation (Galatians 1:16a)
  - iii. The purpose of the revelation (Galatians 1:16b)
  - iv. The response to the revelation (Galatians 1:16c-17)
  - d. His independence of the Jerusalem apostles (Galatians 1:18-24)
    - i. The first visit to Jerusalem (Galatians 1:18-20)
      - a. The time of the visit (Galatians 1:18a)
      - b. The purpose of the visit (Galatians 1:18b)
      - c. The duration of the visit (Galatians 1:18c)
      - d. The scope of contacts during the visit (Galatians 1:19-20)
    - ii. The subsequent absence from Jerusalem (Galatians 1:21-24)
      - a. The place of his withdrawal (Galatians 1:21)
      - b. The lack of acquaintance with the Judean churches (Galatians 1:22)
      - c. The response of the churches to reports about him (Galatians 1:23-24)
  - 2. How his Gospel was confirmed by the apostles at Jerusalem (Galatians 2:1-10)
    - a. The circumstances of its presentation to them (Galatians 2:1-2)
      - i. The journey to Jerusalem (Galatians 2:1-2a)
      - ii. The presentation made at Jerusalem (Galatians 2:2b)
    - b. The outcome of his presentation of his Gospel to them (Galatians 2:3-10)
      - i. The maintenance of his position, as seen in Titus Galatians 2:3
      - ii. The conflict with the false brethren (Galatians 2:4-5)
        - a. The presence of the false brethren (Galatians 2:4)
        - b. The refusal to yield to their demands (Galatians 2:5)
      - iii. The approval of his Gospel by the Jerusalem leaders (Galatians 2:6-10)
        - a. Their failure to add anything to his Gospel (Galatians 2:6)
        - b. Their approval of his Gospel in full (Galatians 2:7-10)
          - 1. The basis of their approval (Galatians 2:7-9a)
          - 2. The expression of their approval (Galatians 2:9b)
          - 3. The one request with their approval (Galatians 2:10)
  - 3. How he rebuked Peter's inconsistent conduct (Galatians 2:11-21)
    - a. The circumstances when giving the rebuke (Galatians 2:11-13)
      - i. The fact of his rebuke of Peter (Galatians 2:11)
      - ii. The reason for his rebuke of Peter (Galatians 2:12)
      - iii. The effect of the inconsistent conduct of Peter (Galatians 2:13)
    - b. The justification for giving the rebuke (Galatians 2:14-21)
      - i. His question of rebuke to Peter (Galatians 2:14)
      - ii. His explanation of his doctrinal position (Galatians 2:15-21)
        - a. The insufficiency of the law (Galatians 2:15-18)
          - 1. The discovery of believing Jews about justification (Galatians 2:15-16)
          - 2. The rejection of a conclusion from Peter's action (Galatians 2:17)
          - 3. The significance of a return to law-works (Galatians 2:18)
        - b. The new life in Christ (Galatians 2:19-21)
          - 1. The effect of the law led to the new life (Galatians 2:19)
          - 2. The nature of the new life (Galatians 2:20)
          - 3. The grace of God nullified by law-keeping (Galatians 2:21)
- II. DOCTRINAL: THE EXPOSITION OF JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH (Galatians 3:1-4:31)
- 1. The elaboration of the doctrine of justification (Galatians 3:1-4:7)
    - a. The nature of justification as by faith, not law (Galatians 3:1-14)
      - i. The inconsistency of their conduct (Galatians 3:1-5)
        - a. The question about their turning from the crucified Christ (Galatians 3:1)
        - b. The question about the beginning of their Christian life (Galatians 3:2)
        - c. The question about their method of perfection (Galatians 3:3)
        - d. The question about their sufferings as believers (Galatians 3:4)
        - e. The question about the basis of God's work among them (Galatians 3:5)
      - ii. The example of Abraham's justification (Galatians 3:6-9)
        - a. The means of Abraham's justification (Galatians 3:6)
        - b. The identity of the sons of Abraham (Galatians 3:7)

- c. The announcement to Abraham concerning Gentile justification by faith (Galatians 3:8)
      - d. The sharers in the blessings of Abraham (Galatians 3:9)
    - iii. The deliverance from law-works through Christ (Galatians 3:10-14)
      - a. The curse upon those under law-works (Galatians 3:10)
      - b. The inability of law-works to justify (Galatians 3:11-12)
      - c. The deliverance from the curse through Christ (Galatians 3:13-14)
        - 1. The fact of our deliverance through Christ (Galatians 3:13a)
        - 2. The means of our deliverance from the curse (Galatians 3:13b)
        - 3. The purpose in our deliverance from the curse (Galatians 3:14)
  - b. The limitations of the law and its relations to faith (Galatians 3:15-4:7)
    - i. The covenant with Abraham unaltered by the law (Galatians 3:15-18)
      - a. The illustration of a man's covenant as binding (Galatians 3:15)
      - b. The fact illustrated is the divine promise to Abraham (Galatians 3:16)
      - c. The application of the principle of an unalterable covenant (Galatians 3:17-18)
        - 1. The law did not alter the promise (Galatians 3:17)
        - 2. The inheritance is not through law but promise (Galatians 3:18)
    - ii. The true place and purpose of the law (Galatians 3:19-29)
      - a. The temporary nature of the law (Galatians 3:19-20)
        - 1. The reason for the adding of the law (Galatians 3:19a)
        - 2. The time limit for the law (Galatians 3:19b)
        - 3. The manner of the establishment of the law (Galatians 3:19c-20)
      - b. The inability of the law to produce life (Galatians 3:21-22)
        - 1. The law not contrary to the promise (Galatians 3:21a)
        - 2. The law unable to produce life (Galatians 3:21b)
        - 3. The Scripture shut up all to faith in Christ (Galatians 3:22)
      - c. The law as a child-leader to Christ with His blessings (Galatians 3:23-29)
        - 1. The old position under law (Galatians 3:23-24)
          - a. The position of confinement under law (Galatians 3:23)
          - b. The function of the law as child-leader to Christ (Galatians 3:24)
        - 2. The new position in Christ (Galatians 3:25-29)
          - a. The nature of the new position (Galatians 3:25-26)
          - b. The entry into the new life (Galatians 3:27)
          - c. The effect of the new life (Galatians 3:28)
          - d. The fulfillment of the promise to Abraham (Galatians 3:29)
  - iii. The contrasted position under law and faith (Galatians 4:1-7)**
    - a. The illustration of the position of the heir as a minor (Galatians 4:1-2)
    - b. The application of the illustration to believers (Galatians 4:3-6)
      - 1. The condition of bondage as minors (Galatians 4:3)
      - 2. The position as free sons through God's Son (Galatians 4:4-6)
        - a. The sending of the Son of God (Galatians 4:4-5)
        - b. The sending of the Spirit of God (Galatians 4:6)
      - 3. The conclusion for the believer (Galatians 4:7)
2. The appeal for them to drop their legalism (Galatians 4:8-31)
  - a. The acceptance of Jewish legalism is a return to bondage (Galatians 4:8-11)
    - i. Their past condition of bondage (Galatians 4:8)
    - ii. Their present deliverance from bondage (Galatians 4:9a)
    - iii. Their legalism as a return to bondage (Galatians 4:9b-10)
    - iv. Their action a cause of concern to him (Galatians 4:11)
  - b. The appeal from his relations to them (Galatians 4:12-20)
    - i. The appeal for them to adopt his position (Galatians 4:12a)
    - ii. The reminder of his past relations to them (Galatians 4:12b-14)
    - iii. The change in their relation to him (Galatians 4:15-18)
    - iv. The travail he is undergoing for them (Galatians 4:19-20)
  - c. The appeal from the two contrasted covenants (Galatians 4:21-31)
    - i. The question to those desiring to be under law (Galatians 4:21)
    - ii. The story of Abraham's two sons (Galatians 4:22-23)
    - iii. The allegorical interpretation of the story (Galatians 4:24-30)

- a. The two mothers representing two covenants (Galatians 4:24a)
  - b. The description of the two covenants (Galatians 4:24b-28)
    - 1. The one representing a covenant of bondage (Galatians 4:24b-25)
    - 2. The other representing a covenant of freedom (Galatians 4:26-28)
  - c. The expulsion of the slave woman and her son (Galatians 4:29-30)
  - iv. The conclusion from the story (Galatians 4:31)
- III. PRACTICAL: THE LIFE OF CHRISTIAN LIBERTY (Galatians 5:1-6:10)
- 1. The call to maintain their Christian liberty (Galatians 5:1)
  - 2. The peril to Christian liberty (Galatians 5:2-12)
    - a. The peril to them in circumcision (Galatians 5:2-6)
      - i. The consequences of accepting circumcision (Galatians 5:2-4)
        - a. It renders Christ useless to them (Galatians 5:2)
        - b. It makes a man debtor to do the whole law (Galatians 5:3)
        - c. It severs them from Christ (Galatians 5:4a)
        - d. It constitutes a fall from grace (Galatians 5:4b)
      - ii. The attitude of the true believer (Galatians 5:5-6)
    - b. The condemnation of the false teacher (Galatians 5:7-12)
      - i. The explanation for their defection (Galatians 5:7)
      - ii. The characterization of the teaching (Galatians 5:8-9)
      - iii. The condemnation of the one troubling them (Galatians 5:10-12)
        - a. The confidence he has in them (Galatians 5:10a)
        - b. The troubler will bear his judgment (Galatians 5:10b)
        - c. The refutation of charges that he preaches circumcision (Galatians 5:11)
        - d. The wish that these teachers would go to the consistent end (Galatians 5:12)

- 3. The life of Christian liberty (Galatians 5:13-6:10)
  - a. It is directed by love (Galatians 5:13-15)
    - i. The believer called to liberty (Galatians 5:13a)
    - ii. The use of Christian liberty (Galatians 5:13b)
    - iii. The fulfillment of the law through love (Galatians 5:14)
    - iv. The results of the lack of love (Galatians 5:15)
  - b. It is a walk in the Spirit, not in the flesh (Galatians 5:16-25)
    - i. The command to walk by the Spirit (Galatians 5:16)
    - ii. The conflict between the Spirit and the flesh (Galatians 5:17-18)
    - iii. The contrasted products of the flesh and the Spirit (Galatians 5:19-23)
      - a. The works of the flesh (Galatians 5:19-21)
      - b. The fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23)
    - iv. The persons living by the Spirit (Galatians 5:24-25)
  - c. It is a life of mutual burden-bearing (Galatians 5:26-6:10)
    - i. The burden of moral faults (Galatians 5:26-6:5)
      - a. The warning against wrong attitudes towards others (Galatians 5:26)
      - b. The attitude of humility in restoring the fallen (Galatians 6:1)
      - c. The duty of mutual burden-bearing (Galatians 6:2)
      - d. The proper attitude toward self (Galatians 6:3-5)
    - ii. The burden of temporal needs (Galatians 6:6-10)
      - a. The exhortation to communicate with their teachers (Galatians 6:6)
      - b. The law of the spiritual harvest (Galatians 6:7-8)
      - c. The encouragement to well-doing (Galatians 6:9-10)

#### THE CONCLUSION (Galatians 6:11-17)

- 1. His reference to his large letters (Galatians 6:11)
- 2. His rebuke of his adversaries (Galatians 6:12-13)
- 3. His confidence in the cross (Galatians 6:14-16)
  - a. His glorying only in the cross (Galatians 6:14a)
  - b. His crucifixion through the cross (Galatians 6:14b)
  - c. His evaluation of things through the cross (Galatians 6:15)
  - d. His benediction upon those accepting this principle (Galatians 6:16)
- 4. His marks of apostleship (Galatians 6:17)

#### THE BENEDICTION (Galatians 6:18)

**Galatians 4:1 Now I say, as long as the heir is a child, he does not differ at all from a slave although he is owner of everything,**

KJV Galatians 4:1 Now I say, That the heir, as long as he is a child, differeth nothing from a servant, though he be lord of all;

- **as long as the heir** Galatians 4:23,29; Genesis 24:2,3; 2 Kings 10:1,2; 11:12; 12:2
- Galatians 4 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries
- Galatians 4:1-11 - Don Anderson [Galatians Study 7; More Notes on Galatians Study 7](#)
- [Warren Wiersbe's sermon Born Free - Galatians 4](#) - one of the simplest and most profound expositions you will ever hear on Galatians 4!

<https://www.sermonindex.net/modules/mydownloads/visit.php?lid=17314>

**Hiebert's Outline - The contrasted position under law and faith** (Galatians 4:1-7) (See context in [An Introduction to the New Testament, Volume 2](#))

- A. The illustration of the position of the heir as a minor (Galatians 4:1-2)
- B. The application of the illustration to believers (Galatians 4:3-6)
  1. The condition of bondage as minors (Galatians 4:3)
  2. The position as free sons through God's Son (Galatians 4:4-6)
    - a. The sending of the Son of God (Galatians 4:4-5)
    - b. The sending of the Spirit of God (Galatians 4:6)
  3. The conclusion for the believer (Galatians 4:7)

In his introduction to this chapter **Warren Wiersbe** makes the point that "One of the tragedies of legalism is that it gives the appearance of spiritual maturity when, in reality, it leads the believer back into a "second childhood" of Christian experience. The Galatian Christians, like most believers, wanted to grow and go forward for Christ; but they were going about it in the wrong way. Their experience is not too different from that of Christians today who get involved in various legalistic movements, hoping to become better Christians. Their motives may be right, but their methods are wrong. This is the truth Paul is trying to get across to his beloved converts in Galatia. The Judaizers had bewitched them into thinking that the Law would make them better Christians. Their old nature felt an attraction for the Law because the Law enabled them to do things and measure external results. As they measured themselves and their achievements, they felt a sense of accomplishment, and, no doubt, a little bit of pride. They thought they were going forward when actually they were regressing. Such people are in a situation similar to the airplane passengers who heard their pilot announce: "Our navigator has lost our position, folks, and we have been flying rather aimlessly for over an hour. That's the bad news. But the good news is that we are making very good time." (See context in [Be Free \(Galatians\): Exchange Legalism for True Spirituality](#) or borrow [Be Free: An Expository Study of Galatians](#))

**Now I say, as long as the heir is a child** - Paul expands on the analogy of a child's coming of age (3:24-26), contrasting believers' lives before salvation (as children and servants), with their lives after salvation (as adults and sons). Both Paul's Jewish and Gentile readers readily understood this imagery, since the Jews, Greeks, and Romans all had a ceremony to mark a child's coming of age.

**Robertson** - Illustration from the law of inheritance carrying on the last thought in Gal 3:29. "And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's descendants, heirs according to promise." ([Galatians 4 - Robertson's Word Pictures in the New Testament](#))

**Child (3516) (nepios)** from **nê** = negative + **epos** = not able to talk) means literally one that does not talk or not speaking and thus a small child above age of a helpless infant but probably not more than three or four years of age. Figuratively nepios refers to a person who lacks experience, is untried or ignorant or simple-minded. The writer to the Hebrews used it of one spiritually immature (Heb 5:13) as did Paul (1Co 3:1) for they cannot eat solid food (spiritually speaking). **Robertson** adds that **nepios** is "That is a minor, an infant, immature intellectually and morally in contrast with **τελειοι** [teleioi], full grown (1 Cor. 3:1; 14:20; Phil. 3:15; Eph. 4:13)" ([Galatians 4 - Robertson's Word Pictures in the New Testament](#))

**Wuest** on **nepios** - The idea of immaturity is in the word, and according to the context in which it is found, it could refer to either mental or spiritual immaturity.

**Utley** on **nepios** - This was the Greek term for infant, used in the sense of: (1) spiritual babies; or (2) legal minors. In ancient

Mediterranean cultures, the rite of passage from boyhood to manhood occurred at different ages and was a major cultural/religious event: (a) in Jewish culture, it was age 13; (b) in Greek culture, it was age 18; and (c) in Roman culture, it was usually at age 14. ([Galatians 4](#))

**NET Note** - The Greek term *nēpios* refers to a young child, no longer a helpless infant but probably not more than three or four years old (L&N 9.43). The point in context, though, is that this child is too young to take any responsibility for the management of his assets. ([Galatians 4](#))

The great truth is that believers are heirs of God in Christ - Gal. 3:7, 16, 24–26, 29, Ro 8:17 and chapter 4 continues this emphasis - Gal. 4:1, 5, 6, 7, 28–31.

**Heir (2818)** (**Kleronomos** from **kleros** = a lot - lots were cast or drawn to divide property or select a winner or an heir +**nemomai** = to possess, to distribute among themselves), literally refers to one who obtains a lot or portion. It is one who receives something as a possession or a beneficiary (the person named as in an insurance policy to receive proceeds or benefits). It signifies more than one who inherits and it includes the idea of taking into possession. The New Testament usage of **kleronomos** applies primarily to the realm of spiritual inheritance. A **heir** is one who receives or is entitled to receive some endowment or quality from a parent or predecessor. In ancient times, inheritance was often determined by casting lots (such as with land disposition). This practice was further attested even in secular life by Herodotus (2:109), Plato (Lg.74) Lot-casting determined land allotments (distribution) related to inheritance, as well as to "title-deeds, legacy, inheritance, heritable estate" (LS).] In the Greco-Roman world the word **kleronomos** was a legal term and was found on ancient inscriptions of Asia Minor to refer to a son after he was succeeded to the inheritance as representative of his father, undertaking all the duties and obligations of his father.

**Richards** writes that **kleronomos** is "one who takes possession of or inherits. The emphasis is on the heir's right to possess." (See context [New International Encyclopedia of Bible Words](#))

**Vincent** comments that...

an inheritance is originally a portion which one receives by lot in a general distribution. In the New Testament the idea of chance attaching to the lot is eliminated. It is the portion or heritage which one receives by virtue of birth or by special gift. So of the vineyard seized by the wicked husbandmen: "Let us seize on his inheritance" (Matt. 21:38); of Abraham in Canaan: "God gave him none inheritance" (Acts 7:5); "an eternal inheritance" (see note Hebrews 9:15).

The figure (of an heir and the inheritance) is based upon Roman, not upon Jewish, law. According to Roman law, all the children, sons and daughters, inherited alike. According to Jewish law, the inheritance of the sons was unequal, and the daughters were excluded, except where there were no male heirs. Thus the Roman law furnished a more truthful illustration of the privileges of Christians.

(Commenting on Jesus as **heir** in Heb 1:2 [\[note\]](#)) God eternally predestined the Son to be the possessor and sovereign of all things. Compare Psalm 89:28 [\[Spurgeon's note\]](#). **Heirship** goes with **sonship**. See Ro 8:17 [\[note\]](#); Gal. 4:7. Christ attained the Messianic Lordship through incarnation. Something was acquired as the result of His incarnation which He did not possess before it, and could not have possessed without it. Equality with God was His birthright; but out of His human life, death, and resurrection came a type of sovereignty which could pertain to Him only through His triumph over human sin in the flesh (He 1:3 [note](#)), through His identification with men as their brother. Messianic Lordship could not pertain to His preincarnate state: it is a matter of function, not of inherent power and majesty. He was essentially Son of God; He must become Son of man.)

**Gary Hill** on **heir** - A believer becomes an heir (*klēronómos*) to the Father's kingdom when (spiritually) adopted, which happens at conversion (being born-again). With sonship (adoption) each receives "right of possession," i.e. to inherit their Father's provisions as they live in faith. (Note the close relationship of faith and *klēronómos* in Heb 11:6,7.) Our eternal inheritance (heirship) is established now as we lay hold of our earthly inheritance – i.e. to the level we receive (obey) faith from God. The full enjoyment of our eternal inheritance then in the afterlife correlates directly to the extent of our sanctification in this life. In Greco-Roman culture, only a son could inherit the possessions of the father (be a legitimate heir). In Scripture, inheritance is equally given (applied) to female believers (see Gal 3:28). [Heirs can also be disinherited by their disobedience, i.e. their failure to act as faithful sons. In antiquity, wills were not written out and were changed simply by the father orally amending his will before witnesses (2PeB, 3, 278).] Reflection: Every true believer, by redemption, is a son – and engrafted into the mystical body of Jesus Christ, the eternal Son. Salvation makes each believer an heir (2818/*klēronómos*) to heaven's riches. The Father only shares His riches with family members! God's "will-testament" (1242/*diathēkē*) brings riches beyond description, to all those walking in faith (cf. 1 Cor 2:9 with Heb 11:6). Obedience is the instrument of inheritance, but only the work of the Lord is the cause of it. This means we do not live for victory – but rather from victory!



**He does not differ at all from a slave although he is owner of everything**- "being legally owner of all"

**Everything** is the Greek adjective *pas* (panton in this passage) and without a Greek definite article as in this verse it means "all" indefinitely as "each (every) part that applies." The meaning includes the total picture but still "one element at a time."

**Slave** (1401)(**doulos** from **deo** = to bind; more on **doulos**) was an individual bound to another (thus "bond slave" or "bond servant") in servitude. It describes someone who belongs to another without any ownership rights of their own. The **doulos** had no life of his own, no will of his own, no purpose of his own and no plan of his own. All was subject to his master. **Doulos** conveys the idea of the slave's close, binding ties with his master, belonging to him, obligated to and desiring to do his will and in a permanent relation of servitude. The **slave's** every thought, breath, and effort was subject to the will of his master. In sum, the will of the **doulos** is consumed in the will of the master. In sum, the picture of a **bondservant** is one who is absolutely surrendered and totally devoted to his master. In the Greek culture **doulos** usually referred to the involuntary, permanent service of a slave. In the epistles of Paul and Peter elevates the meaning of **doulos** to the Hebrew sense which describes a servant who willingly commits himself to serve a master he loves and respects (cp Ex 21:5, 6 Dt 15:12-16). By Roman times, slavery was so extensive that in the early Christian period one out of every two people was a slave! From at least 3000 BC captives in war were the primary source of slaves.

**Doulos in Galatians** - Gal. 1:10; Gal. 3:28; Gal. 4:1; Gal. 4:7

**Owner** (2962)(**kurios** from **kuros** = might or power, related to **kuroo** = to give authority) primarily means the possessor, owner, master, the supreme one, one who is sovereign (used this way of Roman emperors - Act 25:26+) and possesses authority, ownership and power. **Kurios** is used of the one to whom a person or thing belonged, over which he has the power of deciding, the one who is the master or disposer of a thing (Mk 7:28+)

**Kurios in Galatians** - Gal. 1:3; Gal. 1:19; Gal. 4:1; Gal. 5:10; Gal. 6:14; Gal. 6:18;

**Galatians 4:2 but he is under guardians and managers until the date set by the father.**

KJV Galatians 4:2 But is under tutors and governors until the time appointed of the father.

- Galatians 4 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries
- Galatians 4:1-11 - Don Anderson [Galatians Study 7](#); [More Notes on Galatians Study 7](#)

**Hiebert's Outline - The contrasted position under law and faith** (Galatians 4:1-7) (See context in [An Introduction to the New Testament, Volume 2](#))

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  3. The conclusion for the believer (Galatians 4:7)

**But** - Term of contrast.

**He is under** (*hupo*) **guardians and managers** - That is the child is subject to the authority of the **guardians and managers**. Under Roman law, boys from birth to 14 years of age were under the charge of legal **guardians** and then from age 14-25 their property was administered by **managers**. However Roman law did give Roman fathers some discretion in setting the time of their son's transition from boyhood to manhood. It also sets the stage for Paul's statement in Galatians 4:4 that God the Father chose the time that His Son would bring in our maturity.

In Galatians 3 Paul taught that all were **under the Law** described as: (1) a "**guard**" which kept us in protective custody (Gal 3:22-23) and (2) a "**tutor**" of children (Gal 3:24-25) and now he changes the metaphor to **guardians and managers**.

**Under** is **hupo** a preposition which (in the accusative case) refers to a position below an object or below another position. **Hupo** in this context means we were all under **guardians and managers**. The preposition **hupo** is used several times in Galatians 3 to describes different "entities" (curse, sin, law, tutor) we were all under

Galatians 3:10+ For as many as are of the works of the Law are **under** a curse; for it is written, "CURSED IS EVERYONE WHO DOES NOT ABIDE BY ALL THINGS WRITTEN IN THE BOOK OF THE LAW, TO PERFORM THEM."

Galatians 3:22+ But the Scripture has shut up ([sugkleio](#) - ENCLOSED, "TRAPPED") everyone **under** sin (NLT = "prisoners of sin"), so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe.

Galatians 3:23+ But before faith came, we were kept in custody ([phroureo](#) from phrouros = a guard - GUARDED, KEPT IN STRICT CONTROL, RESTRAINED) **under** the law, being shut up to the faith which was later to be revealed.

Galatians 3:25+ But now that faith has come, we are no longer **under** a tutor ([paidagogos](#) - METAPHOR FOR THE LAW).

Paul had earlier Gal. 3:22–25+ says we were "under the Law," described as: (1) a jailor which kept us in protective custody (cf. Gal 3:22–23+); or (2) an adolescent custodian (cf. Gal 3:24–25+). However, in chapter 4, the metaphor changes to "guardian" and "trustee."

**Hupo in Galatians** - Gal. 1:11; Gal. 3:10; Gal. 3:17; Gal. 3:22; Gal. 3:23; Gal. 3:25; Gal. 4:2; Gal. 4:3; Gal. 4:4; Gal. 4:5; Gal. 4:9; Gal. 4:21; Gal. 5:15; Gal. 5:18;

**Guardians** (2012) ([epitropos](#) from [epí](#) = to + [trépo](#) = to turn; verb [epitrepo](#) = to commit or entrust) is one put in charge or control - (other things) foreman, manager, agent and (over persons) governor. It was used frequently in the papyri as guardian of minors, the sense here in (Gal 4:2). A person entrusted to act in another's name or to whose care anything is committed by another (Mt. 20:8 = "foreman"); a steward (Lk 8:3+) or treasurer to a prince, or a deputy governor, or a Roman procurator; a guardian to whom the care of orphans is committed, the same as [paidagogos](#), a guardian (Gal. 4:2). **Vincent** - adds that "The word thus literally means, one to whom the management of affairs is turned over."

**Managers** (3623) ([oikonomos](#) from [oikos](#) = house + [némo](#) = manage, distribute, dispense; cf [oikonomia](#)) is literally the manager or superintendent of a household or estate. It describes the manager of a household whether freeborn or slave (Lk 12:42+ = "steward", 1 Cor 4:2)

**A T Robertson** note on [oikonomos](#) - "Papyri show it as manager of an estate and also as treasurer like Ro 16:23. No example is known where this word is used of one in charge of a minor and no other where both occur together." ([Galatians 4 - Robertson's Word Pictures in the New Testament](#))

**Until** - This time sensitive. Thus **until** means that if something happens **until** a particular time, it happens during the period before that time and stops at that time. In this context, what ceases is the subjection of the child to the guardians and managers.

**The date set by the father** - It is the father who says when the child is no longer subject to guardians and managers. Under Roman law the age of maturity for a child was set by his father and involved a ceremonial donning of the [toga virilis](#) and his formal acknowledgement as son and heir.

**Note:** [Toga virilis](#) was a white toga symbolizing manhood that boys of ancient Rome were allowed to wear at age 15.

**Set** (only here in Bible) (4287) ([prothesmia](#) from [pro](#) = before + [thesmos](#) = custom, from [tithemi](#) = to place) refers to a time selected in advance, a pre-appointed day or time, the day or time being understood

**Gilbrant - Prothesmia** is a noun found often in the classical Greek writings. It was an Athenian legal term used to denote a statute of limitations. In this sense it means the time defined for bringing actions or prosecutions. It also identified the period allowed to a defendant for paying damages. The one who had passed the day of payment was [ekprothesmos](#) or [huperprothesmos](#)—beyond the date or past due. It can also refer to any prefixed time. The New Testament uses the term only once. In Galatians 4:2 [prothesmia](#) signifies a time fixed beforehand. The father established a time when the tutorship of the child would end. At that time the child would no longer be treated as a minor but as an adult. The time was prearranged by the father for his child to assume adult responsibilities and family heirship. Paul used this analogy in reference to the believers' condition prior to God's intervention in Christ. This intervention took place in the "fulness of the time" (Galatians 4:4). ([Complete Biblical Library Greek-English Dictionary](#))

**Galatians 4:3 So also we, while we were children, were held in bondage under the elemental things of the world.**

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KJV Galatians 4:3 Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world:

- **while we were children** Galatians 3:19,24,25
- **were held in bondage** Galatians 4:9,25,31; 2:4; 3:23; 5:1; Matthew 11:28; John 8:31; Acts 15:10; Romans 8:15
- **the elemental things of the world** Galatians 4:9; Colossians 2:8,20; Hebrews 7:16
- Galatians 4 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries
- Galatians 4:1-11 - Don Anderson [Galatians Study 7](#); [More Notes on Galatians Study 7](#)
- [Warren Wiersbe's sermon Born Free - Galatians 4](#) - one of the simplest and most profound expositions you will ever hear on Galatians 4!

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**So also we, while we were children, were held in bondage-** Who is **we**? Probably both Jews and Gentiles. We were enslaved and the [perfect tense](#) describes this as every person's persistent state or condition in Adam, before their salvation by grace through faith, the moment the Spirit places them in Christ, in covenant and oneness and identity with Him. In short, we were all of the fixed status as slaves, not free men and women.

**Children** ([3516](#)) see Gal 4:1 discussion of [nepios](#)

**Under the elemental things of the world - Under** is *hupo* a preposition which (in the accusative case as in Gal 4:3) refers to a position below an object or below another position. **Hupo** means we were under the effects of **the elemental things**. **Hupo** "implies operating directly under the efficient cause, i.e. below the one directly making something happen," in this case **the elemental things** "making something happen."

**Hupo** in Galatians - Gal. 1:11; Gal. 3:10; Gal. 3:17; Gal. 3:22; Gal. 3:23; Gal. 3:25; Gal. 4:2; Gal. 4:3; Gal. 4:4; Gal. 4:5; Gal. 4:9; Gal. 4:21; Gal. 5:15; Gal. 5:18;

**Wiersbe** - This word **elements** means the basic principles, the ABCs. For some fifteen centuries, Israel had been in kindergarten and grade school, learning their "spiritual ABCs," so that they would be ready when Christ would come. Then they would get the full revelation, for Jesus Christ is "the Alpha and the Omega" (Rev. 22:13); He encompasses all the alphabet of God's revelation to man. He is God's last Word (Heb. 1:1-3). Legalism, then, is not a step toward maturity; it is a step back into childhood. The Law was not God's final revelation; but it was the preparation for that final revelation in Christ. It is important that a person know his ABCs, because they are the foundation for understanding all of the language. But the man who sits in a library and recites the ABCs instead of reading the great literature that is around him, is showing that he is immature and ignorant, not mature and wise. Under the Law, the Jews were children in bondage, not sons enjoying liberty. (See context in [Be Free Galatians: Exchange Legalism for True Spirituality](#))

**Elemental things** ([4747](#))([stoicheion](#) from [stoicheo](#) = march in rank from [stoichos](#) = row) describes something orderly in arrangement as for example of things in a row and hence an element. In most of its uses, it denotes an elementary or fundamental principle in a subject or discipline. It refers to the first principles of something. **Stoicheion** speaks of the fundamentals, like the basic components comprising a particular philosophy, structure, etc.; and figuratively of "first principles," like the basics or fundamentals of Christianity. (See [lengthy note by Burton](#))

**Stoicheion** ("elements") refers to the basic building blocks of matter, such as atomic and subatomic particles.

**NET Note on elemental things** - Or "basic principles," "elemental things," or "elemental spirits." Some interpreters take this as a reference to supernatural powers who controlled nature and/or human fate. (**ED**: See NRSV = "we were enslaved to the elemental spirits of the world;" TEV paraphrase = "were slaves of the ruling spirits of the universe.") ([Galatians 4](#))

**Bob Utley** on elemental things notes that one of the meanings of **stoicheion** is "the heavenly bodies (cf. I Enoch 52:8-9); and this is

how the early church fathers interpreted its use in Col. 2:8, 20. Closely identified with #3 was the indirect meaning that behind heavenly bodies were spiritual powers, a common usage which could influence the interpretation of Gal 4:3, 8–10 (cf. the angels of Col. 2:18–20 and Gal. 3:19). However, in his book *Christ and the Powers*, published by Herald Press, Hendrik Berkhof states that these powers are impersonal structures (such as politics, democracy, social class, public mores, sports, philosophy, etc.) in our natural, fallen world which tend to unify mankind apart from God (cf. p. 32). This interpretation fits the biblical examples. Paul was making a parallel between the **Law** as adolescent custodian (cf. Gal 3:22–4:7) and **stoicheia** as slave master (cf. Gal 4:3). ([Galatians 4](#))

**World** (2889) (**kosmos** related to verb **kosmeo** = to order or adorn, put in order [Mt 25:7= "trimmed"], adorn literally [1Ti 2:9], to adorn figuratively [Titus 2:9]) means essentially something that is well-arranged, that which has order or something arranged harmoniously. **Kosmos** refers to a ordered system or a system where order prevails. (like the universe or creation) (See [lengthy note by Burton](#))

**Bob Utley** summarizes Paul's varied use of the word **kosmos**

1. all the created order (cf. Ro 1:20; Eph. 1:4; 1 Cor. 3:22; 8:4, 5)
2. this planet (cf. 2 Cor. 1:17; Eph. 1:10; Col. 1:20; 1 Tim. 1:15; 3:16; 6:7)
3. humans (cf. Gal 1:7–8; 4:9, 13; Rom. 3:6, 19; 11:15; 2 Cor. 5:19; Col. 1:6)
4. humans organized and functioning apart from God (cf. Gal 1:20–21; 2:12; Gal 3:19; 3:22; Gal. 4:3; Eph. 2:2, 12; Phil. 2:15; Col. 2:8, 20–23). It is very similar to John's usage (i.e. 1 John 2:15–17)
5. the current world structures (cf. Gal 4:29–31; Gal. 6:14, similar to Phil. 3:4–9, where Paul describes Jewish structures)

In some ways these overlap and it is hard to categorize every usage. This term, like so many in Paul's thought, must be defined by the immediate context and not a pre-set definition. Paul's terminology was fluid (cf. James Stewart's *A Man in Christ*). He was not attempting to set up a systematic theology, but proclaim Christ. He changes everything!

#### Galatians 4:4 But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law,

KJV Galatians 4:4 But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law,

- **when the fullness of the time came** Ge 49:10; Da 9:24-26; Mal 3:1; Mk 1:15; Acts 1:7; Ep 1:10; Heb 9:10
- **God sent forth His Son** Isaiah 48:16; Zech 2:8-11; John 3:16; 6:38; 8:42; 10:36; 1 John 4:9,10,14
- **born of** Isaiah 9:6,7; Micah 5:2; Zech 6:12; Luke 2:10,11; Jn 1:14; Ro 1:3; 9:5; Phil 2:6-8; 1 Ti 3:16; Heb 2:14; 10:5-7; 1 Jn 4:2
- **a woman** Ge 3:15; Isa 7:14; Jer 31:22; Micah 5:3; Mt 1:23; Luke 1:31,35; 2:7
- **born under the Law** Gal 3:15; 5:17; Luke 2:21-27; Ro 15:8; Col 2:14
- Galatians 4 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries
- Galatians 4:1-11 - Don Anderson [Galatians Study 7](#); [More Notes on Galatians Study 7](#)
- [Warren Wiersbe's sermon Born Free - Galatians 4](#) - one of the simplest and most profound expositions you will ever hear on Galatians 4!

### THE FULLNESS OF TIME

**Hiebert's Outline - The contrasted position under law and faith** (Galatians 4:1-7) (See context in [An Introduction to the New Testament, Volume 2](#))

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**But when - [Time phrase](#),** and indeed one of the most important "time phrases" in all of Scripture!

**The fullness of the time came - [God is sovereign](#)** over every event in time and eternity. When **the time came**, it was **the time** predetermined by the will of God the Father from eternity past. He came the first time in the fullness of time and He will return in the fullness of time!

Why was the "time full"? Several events converged by [God's providential working](#): (1). Roman civilization had brought peace and a road system (cf "[Pax Romana](#)") (2). Grecian civilization provided a language--the lingua franca (3). Jews proclaimed monotheism and messianic hope in the synagogues of the Mediterranean world.

**Note** - There was a REMNANT of Jewish men & women who anticipated the time was at hand "looked for redemption in Jerusalem" (Lu 2:25+ Simeon...looking [[prosdéchomai](#) in present tense = continually looking with earnest expectation] for the consolation of Israel [i.e., THE MESSIAH]). Sadly most of the "chosen people" did not recognize the FULLNESS OF TIME as documented by Luke (Lu 19:44+ you did not recognize the time ([kairos](#)) of your visitation ([episkope](#)).") If they had [read and interpreted literally](#) the prophecy of [Da 9:24-26+] they would have recognized Messiah the Prince (Da 9:25+).

**Wiersbe** - Historians tell us that the Roman world was in great expectation, waiting for a Deliverer, at the time when Jesus was born. The old religions were dying; the old philosophies were empty and powerless to change men's lives. Strange new mystery religions were invading the empire. Religious bankruptcy and spiritual hunger were everywhere. God was preparing the world for the arrival of His Son. (See context in [Be Free Galatians: Exchange Legalism for True Spirituality](#) or borrow [Be Free: An Expository Study of Galatians](#))

**Fullness** ([4138](#))([pleroma](#) from [pleroo](#) = make full, fill, fill up) describes a full measure or abundance with emphasis upon completeness, describing what is fulfilled or is completed without any gap. Paul uses **pleroma** referring to time in Eph 1:10+ "with a view to an administration suitable to the **fullness** (pleroma) of the times, that is, the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things on the earth. In Him."

**NET Note** - "the fullness of time" (an idiom for the totality of a period of time, with the implication of proper completion (LN - the totality of a period of time, with the implication of proper completion—'end, completion) ([Galatians 4](#))

**God sent forth His Son** - His Son is a clear reference to the Deity of Jesus (and the next phrase refers to His Humanity). Notice also that this statement clearly implies that Paul believed in the preexistence of Christ, for how could He be "exapostello'd" so to speak if He did not preexist? As an aside, **God sent forth His Son** is a short variation of John 3:16 "For God so loved the world, that **He gave His only begotten Son**, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life."

This (along with the truth in Gal 4:6) is a fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy...

"Come near to Me, listen to this: From the first I have not spoken in secret, From the time it took place, I was there. And now the Lord GOD has sent Me (MESSIAH), and His Spirit." (Isa 48:16)

**Sent forth** ([1821](#)) see discussion of same verb [exapostello](#) below.

**Born of a woman** - This is a clear allusion to the humanity of Jesus, Who entered the world like every other person born on earth. Thus Paul underscores that Christ is the God-Man. Jesus had to be fully Man to qualify as our Goel, our Kinsman-Redeemer (See [Goel - Our Kinsman Redeemer - In Shadow \(Type\) & Substance](#)). That Jesus was fully God and fully man is a major truth of the gospel of the first century Church (cf. 1 John 4:1-6).

His mention of Christ born of a woman would have recalled to some of his readers (including the Judaizers who would have been familiar with the OT) passages such as...

Genesis 3:15+ And I will put enmity Between you and **the woman**, And between your seed and her seed (CHRIST); He shall bruise you on the head, And you shall bruise him on the heel." (See also [What is the protoevangelium?](#))

Isaiah 7:14+ "Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, a virgin will be with child and bear a son, and she will call His name Immanuel. (Read Mt 1:18-25)

**Robertson** adds that "There is, of course, no direct reference here to the Virgin Birth of Jesus, but his deity had just been affirmed by the words "**His Son**", so that both his deity and humanity are here stated as in Rom. 1:3. Whatever view one holds about Paul's knowledge of the Virgin Birth of Christ one must admit that Paul believed in his actual personal preexistence with God (2 Cor. 8:9; Phil. 2:5-11), not a mere existence in idea. The fact of the Virgin Birth agrees perfectly with the language here." ([Galatians 4 - Robertson's Word Pictures in the New Testament](#))

**Utley** - Paul emphasized the full humanity of Jesus Christ possibly due to the tendency of the [docetic Gnostics](#) (Eph., Col., the Pastoral Epistles and I John) to affirm the deity of Jesus but to deny His humanity. However, there is scant evidence that this heresy influenced the writing of Galatians (cf. Gal 4:3). Surprisingly, [the virgin birth of Jesus](#) is not emphasized or even mentioned outside of the passages on Jesus' birth in Matthew and Luke. Possibly it was too easily misunderstood and connected by pagans to the mythical activities of the Mt. Olympus gods. ([Galatians 4](#))

**Born under the Law** - (cf Ro 1:3) In other words Jesus was born a Jew, for the Gentiles were not under the Law (for they did not even have the Law). Jesus was born under the dispensation of the Old Covenant, the Mosaic Law. He was born a Jew and subject to the Jewish law and regulations established in the Old Testament.

#### Related Resources:

- [How can Jesus be both God and man at the same time?](#)
- [Does Christ have two natures?](#)
- [Why is the humanity of Jesus important?](#)
- [What does "incarnate" mean? How was Jesus God incarnate?](#)
- [How Can Jesus Be God and Man? | Desiring God](#)
- [The Person of Christ - Wayne Grudem](#) - Includes 8 key Christological heresies during Patristic Era (ca. 100–600 AD)

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### The Pursuing God

God sent forth His Son, born of a woman . . . to redeem those who were under the law. —Galatians 4:4-5

Pastor Tim Keller of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in Manhattan rightly observes that Christianity is unique among all religions for it is about God's pursuit of us to draw us to Himself. In every other religious system, people pursue their god, hoping that through good behavior, keeping of rituals, good works, or other efforts they will be accepted by the god they pursue.

The British poet Francis Thompson catches the profound nature of this reality when he writes of the relentless pursuit of God in his life. In his work titled "The Hound of Heaven," he writes that as he fled from God he couldn't outrun "those strong feet that followed . . . with unhurrying chase and unperturbed pace." But God's untiring pursuit of the wayward is not just Thompson's story. At the heart of the Christmas message is the wonderful truth of God's pursuit of every one of us. As Paul affirms, "God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law" (Gal. 4:4-5).

And it's not just the Christmas story. It's the story of God's pursuit of Adam and Eve after the fall. His pursuit of me! His pursuit of you! Where would we be today if God weren't the "Hound of Heaven"? By Joe Stowell ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

Died He for me, who caused His pain?  
For me, who Him to death pursued?  
Amazing love! How can it be  
That Thou, my God, shouldst die for me?  
—Wesley

God's undying desire for you will never cease.

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### A Wonderful Life

When the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son. —Galatians 4:4

Galatians 3:26-4:7

Each December, millions of people around the world watch Frank Capra's 1946 film *It's A Wonderful Life*. Although it wasn't a hit when it debuted, it has become a Christmas classic.

In a *Time* magazine essay, Roger Rosenblatt pondered the film's continuing appeal. He concluded that the story is really about friendship. That helps to explain why we often feel choked up as we watch George Bailey's family and friends rally around him in his time of greatest need. Rosenblatt said, "Just when George thinks he's alone in the world, the world shows up to declare its love for him."

That sentence seems to capture the essence of our celebration of the birth of Jesus. Just when we thought we were alone in the world, Christ came to declare God's love for us. Not only did God send His Son into the world at exactly the right time (Galatians



4:4-5), but He also demonstrated “His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8). That’s the message of Christmas that opens the door to a wonderful life—the joy of knowing Christ and living in His love.

Have you received the gift of eternal life that He offers to you? If not, do so today By David C. McCasland [Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#)

Reflect & Pray

How To Receive Eternal Life

Realize that it is a gift, not a wage (Romans 6:23).

Recognize Jesus as its only source (John 14:6; Acts 4:12).

Receive it by faith, calling on Christ (Romans 10:9-10).

A wonderful life is yours when you know the Christ of Christmas.

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## What If?

When the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law. —Galatians 4:4

Today’s Scripture: Micah 5:1-5

Several years ago a group of historians authored a book called *If—Or History Rewritten*. Some of the ifs those scholars considered were these: What if Robert E. Lee had not lost the Battle of Gettysburg? What if the Moors in Spain had won? What if the Dutch had kept New Amsterdam? What if Booth had missed when he shot at Abraham Lincoln? What if Napoleon had escaped to America?

The attempt to reconstruct the past on the basis of these ifs was only a historian’s game. But apply it for a moment to the central event in history—the birth of Jesus Christ. It was foretold with pinpoint accuracy hundreds of years before by the prophet Micah. The greatest if, therefore—the most startling question to the imagination—is “What if Jesus had not been born as predicted?”

Such an if staggers the mind. It is like imagining the earth without a sunrise or the heavens without stars. Yet this if must be taken seriously, especially at Christmas, because our world is oblivious to the true meaning of Christ’s coming.

Can you imagine what the world would be like without Christ? What would history have been without Him? And at a personal level, what would your life be without Him? Thank God that there are no ifs in history. By Haddon W. Robinson ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

If Christ had never left His throne  
To enter time and space,  
We’d have no hope beyond the grave,  
No knowledge of His grace.  
—Sper

A world without Christ would be a world without hope.

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## "Soft Time"

When the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law. —Galatians 4:4

Today’s Scripture: Galatians 3:26-4:7

After studying the behavior of thousands of cell-phone users, James Katz, a professor of communication at Rutgers University, has concluded that the cell phone has changed the nature of the way we think of time. Researchers now speak of the US as living in “soft time.” This term has been coined to describe the thinking of a cell-phone user who calls at 8:20 to say he will be late for the 8:30 meeting, arrives at 8:45, and considers himself on time because he called ahead.

Unlike us, God is always on time. While we may struggle to understand why He doesn’t act in world events or in our personal lives as speedily as we think He should, the Bible proclaims the punctuality of the Almighty according to His plan. Galatians 4:4-5 says, “When the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons.” And Romans 5:6, “When we were still without strength, in due time [at just the right time] Christ died for the ungodly.”

We can trust this same wise and loving God, who has never been late in His eternal plan, to be right on time in every detail of our lives. By David C. McCasland ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

[reserved](#))

God's thoughts are above human knowledge—  
He moves in mysterious ways  
To work out eternity's purpose  
Through time's short procession of days.  
—Stiefel

God's timing is always right.

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### **Turnaround Expert**

When the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law. —Galatians 4:4

Today's Scripture: Galatians 3:22-4:7

Members of The Turnaround Management Association are rarely asked to join successful companies. Instead, these skilled professionals are called into ailing businesses to help get them back on their feet.

The same need for dramatic change exists throughout society. People who can reverse the downward spiral in an individual's life, a relationship, or a team are constantly in demand.

But what about changing the world? Many people would say that only God can do that. And that's exactly what He sent His Son to do. The Bible describes humanity's downward spiral by saying that the entire world was imprisoned by sin and "in bondage" (Galatians 3:22; 4:3).

Into that hopeless situation Jesus came "to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons" (4:5). The personal turnaround for us begins when we accept God's offer of eternal life in Christ and receive His Spirit into our hearts (v.6). Rather than simply being given a new set of rules and sent off on our own, we are adopted into God's family.

Jesus Christ is the ultimate turnaround expert. He specializes in impossible cases. Will you invite Him into your life today? By David C. McCasland ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

Reflect & Pray

The Lord will turn your life around  
If you'll invite Him in;  
Then you'll at once be heaven-bound,  
No longer chained by sin.  
—Hess

When we choose to follow Jesus, our whole life changes direction.

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### **God Intrudes**

When the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law. —Galatians 4:4

Today's Scripture: Galatians 3:26–4:7

During this Christmas season, it's good to keep a firm grip on the reality of Easter. While the two events are celebrated at different times and in very different ways, they are both integral parts of God's initiative in His grand plan of salvation.

Peter Larson wrote: "Despite our efforts to keep Him out, God intrudes. The life of Jesus is bracketed by two impossibilities: a virgin's womb and an empty tomb. Jesus entered our world through a door marked 'No Entrance' and left through a door marked 'No Exit.'"

James Edwards echoes this theme in his book *The Divine Intruder*: "[God] breaks into this world, even when He is unexpected and unwelcome. God joins us in our weakest and worst moments. There is a Divine Intruder among us."

The stable in Bethlehem and the cross of Calvary remind us that "when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son . . . to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons" (Gal. 4:4-5).

The Lord did not wait for an invitation to enter our world. Clothed with humanity, He lived as our teacher, died as our sacrifice, and



rose from the grave as our Savior.

Christmas is coming—and so is Easter. By David C. McCasland ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

Reflect & Pray

This joyous season of the year  
Should prompt us to recall  
That Jesus' death on Calvary  
Provides new life for all.  
—Sper

Jesus' earthly life is framed by two impossibilities: a virgin's womb and an empty tomb.

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## Christmas Journey

When the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son. —Galatians 4:4

Today's Scripture: Luke 2:1-7

How far is it from Nazareth to Bethlehem? If you're in Pennsylvania, it's about 9 miles and takes about 10 minutes by car. But if you're in Nazareth of Galilee, and you're traveling along with your pregnant wife, as Joseph was, it's about 80 miles to Bethlehem. That journey probably took Joseph and Mary about a week, and they didn't stay in a nice hotel when they got there. All Joseph could find was a stall in a stable, and that's where Mary delivered "her firstborn Son" (Luke 2:7).

But the journey for the infant Jesus was much farther than 80 miles. He left His place in heaven at God's right hand, came to earth, and accepted our humanity. Eventually, He was stretched out on a cross to die, and He was buried in a borrowed tomb. But the journey was not over. He conquered death, left the tomb, walked again among men, and ascended to heaven. Even that is not the journey's end. Someday He will return as King of kings and Lord of lords.

As you take a Christmas journey this month, reflect on the journey Jesus made for us. He came from heaven to earth to die for us, making salvation available through His death on the cross and His glorious resurrection.

Praise God for that first Christmas journey! By David C. Egner ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

Reflect & Pray

When God stepped out of heaven above  
And came down to this earth,  
He clothed Himself in human flesh—  
A Child of lowly birth.  
—D. De Haan

Jesus came to earth for us so we could go to heaven with Him.

## Galatians 4:5 so that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons.

KJV Galatians 4:5 To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.

- **so that He might redeem** Galatians 4:21; 3:13; Matthew 20:28; Luke 1:68; Acts 20:28; Ephesians 1:7; 5:2; Colossians 1:13-20; Titus 2:14; Hebrews 1:3; 9:12,15; 1 Peter 1:18-20; 3:18; Revelation 5:9; 14:3
- **those who were under the Law** Galatians 4:7; 3:26; John 1:12; Romans 8:19,23; 9:4; Ephesians 1:5
- Galatians 4 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries
- Galatians 4:1-11 - Don Anderson [Galatians Study 7; More Notes on Galatians Study 7](#)
- [Warren Wiersbe's sermon Born Free - Galatians 4](#) - one of the simplest and most profound expositions you will ever hear on Galatians 4!

**Hiebert's Outline - The contrasted position under law and faith** (Galatians 4:1-7) (See context in [An Introduction to the New](#)

## [Testament, Volume 2\)](#)

- A. The illustration of the position of the heir as a minor (Galatians 4:1-2)
- B. The application of the illustration to believers (Galatians 4:3-6)
  1. The condition of bondage as minors (Galatians 4:3)
  2. The position as free sons through God's Son (Galatians 4:4-6)
    - a. The sending of the Son of God (Galatians 4:4-5)
    - b. The sending of the Spirit of God (Galatians 4:6)
  3. The conclusion for the believer (Galatians 4:7)

### SETTING FREE BY PAYING A PRICE

One English dictionary defines **redeem** as "to recover possession or ownership of by payment of a price or service." Webster has "to buy back; to free from what distresses or harms: such as to free from captivity by payment of ransom; to extricate from or help to overcome something detrimental."

**So that - [term of purpose](#)** - Gives the purpose for which God sent forth His Son and it was that He might be the Redeemer of men in bondage to the Law and sin. In Galatians 4:4 Paul

**He might redeem those who were under the Law** - The implication of being **under the Law** is also of being under the curse (Gal 3:13). See also Ro 2:12 Ro 3:19 1 Cor 9:20, 21 Gal 3:10, 23. Like all men, Jesus was obligated to obey God's law. Unlike anyone else, however, He perfectly obeyed that law (Jn 8:46; 2Co 5:21; Heb 4:15; Heb 7:26; 1 Pe 2:22; 1 Jn 3:5). In Paul's day a slave could be purchased in a Roman city and the purchaser could either keep the slave for himself or he could set the slave free. Jesus was our "Purchaser" Who paid the price to set us free. The paradox is that while we are now at liberty, we are also His possession (Titus 2:14).

**Under** is hupo which means submission or subjection to authority, rule, command, power of the Law.

Gal 3:22+ But the Scripture has shut up everyone **under** (hupo) sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe.

Ro 6:14+ For sin shall not be master over you (IMPLIES IT STILL HAS THAT POTENTIAL!), (WHY) for you are not under (hupo - the authority and power of the) law but under (hupo) grace.

**Might redeem** (1805)([exagorazo](#) from **ek** = out or from + **agorazo** = acquire in exchange for money with result that whatever has been bought is buyer's possession <> **agora** = market place) means literally to buy out of (**ek** = out of) the market place. The idea is not just to redeem but to **completely** redeem. Exagorazo is used only 4x in NT - Gal. 3:13; Gal. 4:5; Eph. 5:16; Col. 4:5. Paul has already used this verb in Galatians 3

Christ **redeemed** us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us—for it is written, "CURSED IS EVERYONE WHO HANGS ON A TREE"— (Gal 3:13+)

#### Related Resource:

- [Bob Utley's topic - Ransom/Redeemed](#)
- [What is the meaning of Christian redemption?](#)

**Might redeem** in in the [aorist tense](#), [active voice](#), [subjunctive mood](#), the mood of possibility and potentiality which means that the action described may or may not occur, depending upon circumstances. In other words Jesus was the Redeemer effectively only for those who received by faith God's offer of the gift of redemption and with it eternal life (Ro 6:23+). Jesus was not sent to force redemption on those who did not desire to be redeemed.

**NOTE - Redemption.** Three ideas are involved in the doctrine of redemption: (1) paying the ransom with the blood of Christ (1 Co 6:20+; Rev 5:9+); (2) removal from the curse of the law (Gal 3:13+; Gal 4:5) (3) release from the bondage of sin into the freedom of grace (here and in 1 Pe 1:18+). Redemption is through Jesus' blood; i.e., through the death of Christ (Col 1:14+).

Jesus had to take on flesh and blood in order to qualify as our [Kinsman-Redeemer \(our Goel\)](#) and thus even be able to pay the ransom price:

1 Peter 1:18; 19+ knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers, 19 but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ.

Hebrews 2:14-15+ Therefore, since the children share in flesh and blood, **He Himself likewise also partook of the same**, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, 15 and might free those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives.

Hebrews 2:17+ Therefore, **He had to be made like His brethren in all things**, so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.

**That we might receive the adoption as sons** - This is the purpose of Jesus becoming a God-Man and a Redeemer - that we might receive from God the **adoption**. Paul mentions one of the grand benefits of the redemption by Christ and that is that when we are redeemed we come into God's family as adopted sons and daughters. **Robertson** says adoption as sons is a metaphor, but in fact it is also literally true.

**Wiersbe** - We do not enter God's family by adoption, the way a homeless child would enter a loving family in our own society. The only way to get into God's family is by regeneration, being "born again" (John 3:3). The New Testament word for adoption means "to place as an adult son." It has to do with our standing in the family of God: we are not little children but adult sons with all of the privileges of sonship....We enter God's family by regeneration, but we enjoy God's family by adoption. (Borrow [Be Free: An Expository Study of Galatians](#))

**Utley** on Roman adoption - The adoption metaphor was used primarily in two contexts in Roman culture. In Roman law, adoption was very difficult. A long, involved and expensive legal procedure, once enacted adoption afforded several special rights and privileges: (1) all debts were cancelled; (2) all criminal charges were dropped; (3) they could not be legally put to death by their new father; and (4) they could not be disinherited by their new father. In legal terms, they were a completely new person. Paul was alluding to the believers' security in Christ by using this Roman legal procedure (cf. Rom. 8:15, 23). When a father publicly adopted a son, he officially and permanently became his heir. ([Galatians 4](#))

#### Related Resources:

- In depth discussion on [Adoption](#)
- [What is the Spirit of adoption \(Romans 8:15\)?](#)
- [What does the Bible say about adoption?](#)
- [What does it mean that Christians are adopted by God?](#)
- [Adoption in ancient Rome](#) - Interesting article from Wikipedia

**Receive** (618)([apolambano](#) from **apo** = from + **lambáno** = to receive, take) means to receive fully, receive in full what is one's due, recover fully what is promised or even to receive by way of retribution. This receipt can thus be good or bad news, depending upon how we live our Christian lives. But to the first-century Christian slave this was largely good news, because under Roman law a slave could inherit nothing.

**THOUGHT** - The verb [apolambano](#) can mean to receive back something which one has previously possessed and was used this way in Lk 15:27+ (return of prodigal = "your father has killed the fattened calf because he has **received** him **back** safe and sound.") What has the prodigal lost? His intimate relationship with his father. What has all mankind lost as a result of Adam's sin? Loss of intimacy (walking in the cool of the garden Ge 3:8-9+) with God. Redemption allows fallen men to be received back into fellowship with the Father because of the finished work of the Son.

to That men might be able to receive back or recover (what had we lost? sin brought loss of intimacy; redemption made available that distorted relationship).

**Adoption as sons** (5206)([huiiothesia](#) from **huios** = son + **tithemi** = place) literally means "to place one as a son". **Huiiothesia** speaks of being placed in a position of a son or daughter who now possesses the same rights as the parent's natural children. It means to formally and legally declare that someone who is not one's own child is henceforth to be treated and cared for as one's own child, including complete rights of inheritance.

Below are all the NT uses of **huiiothesia**

Romans 8:15+ For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of **adoption as sons** by which we cry out, "Abba! Father!"

Romans 8:23+ And not only this, but also we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our **adoption as sons**, the redemption of our body.

Romans 9:4+ who are Israelites, to whom belongs the **adoption as sons**, and the glory and the covenants and the giving of the Law and the temple service and the promises,

Galatians 4:5 so that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the **adoption as sons**.

Ephesians 1:5+ ( He predestined us to **adoption as sons** through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will,

**NET Note** - The Greek term **huiothesia** was originally a legal technical term for adoption as a son with full rights of inheritance. BDAG 1024 s.v. notes, "a legal t.t. of 'adoption' of children, in our literature, i.e. in Paul, only in a transferred sense of a transcendent filial relationship between God and humans (with the legal aspect, not gender specificity, as major semantic component)." Although some modern translations remove the filial sense completely and render the term merely "adoption" (cf. NAB), the retention of this component of meaning was accomplished in the present translation by the phrase "as sons." ([Galatians 4](#))

Romans 8:15, 23 For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of **adoption** as sons by which we cry out, "Abba! Father!" 23 And not only this, but also we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our **adoption** as sons, the redemption of our body.

**Related Resource:**

- [Study on Adoption.](#)

Here is a chart from Warren Wiersbe to help see the distinction between a child and a son...

THE CHILD	THE SON
By Regeneration	By Adoption
Entering the Family	Enjoying the Family
Under Guardians	The liberty of an Adult
Cannot Inherit	An Heir to the Father

**Galatians 4:6 Because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!"**

KJV Galatians 4:6 And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father.

- **God has sent forth** Lk 11:13; Jn 7:39; 14:16; Ro 5:5; 8:15-17; 2 Cor 1:22; Eph 1:13; 4:30
- **the Spirit of His Son** Jn 3:34; 15:26; 16:7; Ro 5:5; 8:9,15; 1 Cor 15:45; Phil 1:19; 1 Pe 1:11; Rev 19:10
- **crying, "Abba! Father!"** Isa 44:3-5; Jer 3:4,19; Mt 6:6-9; Lk 11:2; Ro 8:26,27; Ep 2:18; Ep 6:18; Heb 4:14-16; Jude 1:20
- Galatians 4 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries
- Galatians 4:1-11 - Don Anderson [Galatians Study 7](#); [More Notes on Galatians Study 7](#)
- [Warren Wiersbe's sermon Born Free - Galatians 4](#) - one of the simplest and most profound expositions you will ever hear on Galatians 4!

**RESTORATION OF INTIMACY  
WITH THE FATHER**

**Hiebert's Outline - The contrasted position under law and faith** (Galatians 4:1-7) (See context in [An Introduction to the New Testament, Volume 2](#))

- A. The illustration of the position of the heir as a minor (Galatians 4:1-2)
- B. The application of the illustration to believers (Galatians 4:3-6)
  - 1. The condition of bondage as minors (Galatians 4:3)
  - 2. The position as free sons through God's Son (Galatians 4:4-6)

- a. The sending of the Son of God (Galatians 4:4-5)
  - b. The sending of the Spirit of God (Galatians 4:6)
3. The conclusion for the believer (Galatians 4:7)
- (See context [An Introduction to the New Testament, Volume 2](#))

**Because you are sons** - This term of explanation is somewhat unusual as the explanation is found in the following context rather than the preceding context as is most often the case.

**God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son** - "Through His Son we become sons!" In Galatians 4:4 God sent His Son to redeem us and here sends His Spirit Who energizes the heart felt cry of Abba. As alluded to above this passage (along with the truth in Gal 4:4) is a fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy...

"Come near to Me, listen to this: From the first I have not spoken in secret, From the time it took place, I was there. And now the Lord GOD has sent Me (MESSIAH), and His Spirit." (Isa 48:16)

**Into our hearts** - Note, not into our "intellect," (our mind), but our hearts, our [kardia](#), the control center of our being which parallels His leading us as described in Romans and Galatians...

Romans 8:14+ For all who are being (present tense) led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.

Galatians 5:18+ But if you are led ([present tense](#) as your lifestyle, your habitual practice) by the Spirit, you are not under the Law.

**THOUGHT** - How can one avoid the subtle snare of legalism? By being led by the Spirit. And note that in both the passage describing the leading by the Spirit the verb led is in the [passive voice](#). The point is that the leading comes from "without" (from Him) and implies that He will not force us to be led, but that we must continually surrender to His sweet will, His gentle leading. The more we do, the easier it is to follow Him. How are you doing dear follower of Christ?

Notice the three members of the **Trinity** in this passage - Father, Son and Spirit.

**Bob Utley** on the **Holy Spirit** - He is now called "the Spirit of His Son." This shows two works of the Spirit: (1) wooing to Christ; and (2) forming Christ in us (cf. John 16:7-15). The ministry of the Son and the Spirit has always been closely identified ([Galatians 4](#))

#### Related Resources:

- [What does the Bible teach about the Trinity?](#)
- [What is the origin of the doctrine of the Trinity?](#)
- [What are some popular illustrations of the Holy Trinity?](#)

**Sent forth** (1821) ([exapostello](#) from **ek** = out, forth + [apostello](#) = to send away) means to send away or send forth as on a mission (Acts 17:14, Acts 7:12, Acts 11:22). Both here and Gal 4:4 the sending forth is a divine mission from the Father to fallen men to save them (Gal 4:4) and then to sanctify them (Gal 4:6), for the Spirit in the redeemed is the "Power Source" for daily living, daily sanctification (2 Th 2:13, 1 Pe 1:2). Are you learning to lean on the everlasting arms of the Spirit of God for the power to live the Christian life? If not, you are likely experiencing frustration, failure, futility, etc. Our new supernatural life necessitates daily dependence on God's supernatural Source, **the Spirit of His Son!**

For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. 15 For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, "Abba! Father!" 16 The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God, 17 and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him. (Ro 8:14-17)

**Exapostello** is used by Jesus words to His disciples "And behold, I am sending forth the promise of My Father upon you ; but you are to stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high." (THE HOLY SPIRIT - FULFILLED AT PENTECOST - Acts 2:1-4+) (Lk 24:49+)

**Crying** ([krazo](#)) "**Abba! Father!**" - This phrase contains both the Greek (Father - [pater](#)) and Aramaic (Abba) terms for father.

Jews of Old Testament times never used Abba to address God. Jesus used Abba when praying to His Father (Mark 14:36). In so doing, Jesus the Mediator of a New Covenant (Heb 9:15, cf Heb 8:6, Heb 12:24) was foreshadowing the new way of approach and address to the One Whom "No man has seen... at any time." (Jn 1:18, cf Jn 6:46, Ex 33:20). The apostle Paul applied this great

truth to all who have entered the New Covenant through faith in Christ, resulting in God adopting them as His sons and making them joint heirs with Christ of His heavenly inheritance (Ro 8:15-17; Gal 4:5-6)

**Abba** (Aramaic for "father") (3962)(**abba**) is transliterated as Abba into English from the corresponding Aramaic word which was used in the everyday language of families as a term addressing one's father. Children, as well as adult sons and daughters, used **Abba** when speaking to their fathers. And so **Abba** conveys a warm, intimate sense just as with our expression "Dear father." **Abba** emphasizes the warm, intimate and very personal relationship which exists between the believer and God. In Abba filial tenderness, trust and love find their combined expression. **Abba** is a family word which indicates a close, personal, intimate relationship with God as one's Father. This "family term" was used by Jesus in His prayer in Gethsemane (Mk 14:36). Abba is used two other times in the NT (Ro 8:15, Gal 4:6), one of the Spirit crying out and the other of believers crying out "Abba" to God because the Spirit of God has made it clear that they are God's children.

**William Barclay** - There is a world of loveliness in this word Abba, which to our western ears is altogether hidden, unless we know the facts about it. Joachim Jeremias, in his book *The Parables of Jesus*, writes thus: "Jesus' use of the word Abba in addressing God is unparalleled in the whole of Jewish literature. The explanation of this fact is to be found in the statement of the fathers Chrysostom, Theodore, and Theodoret that Abba, (as jaba is still used today in Arabic) was the word used by a young child to its father; it was an everyday family word, which no one had ventured to use in addressing God. Jesus did. He spoke to His heavenly Father in as childlike, trustful, and intimate a way as a little child to its father." We know how our children speak to us and what they call us who are fathers. That is the way in which Jesus spoke to God. Even when he did not fully understand, even when his one conviction was that God was urging him to a cross, he called Abba, as might a little child. Here indeed is trust, a trust which we must also have in that God whom Jesus taught us to know as Father. ([Daily Study Bible](#))

**NET Note on Abba** - The term "Abba" is the Greek transliteration of the Aramaic אָבָא ('abba'), literally meaning "my father" but taken over simply as "father," used in prayer and in the family circle, and later taken over by the early Greek-speaking Christians ([Galatians 4](#))

**Spurgeon** - Oh, blessed, blessed state of heart to feel that now we are born into the family of God, and that the choice word which no slave might ever pronounce may now be pronounced by us, "Abba"! It is a child's word, such as a little child utters when first he opens his mouth to speak, and it runs the same both backwards and forwards, -AB-BA. Oh to have a childlike spirit that, in whatever state of heart I am, I may still be able to say, in the accents even of spiritual infancy, "Abba, Father"! ([Commentary on Romans](#))

**Wayne Barber** applies the truth of the believer's relationship to God the Father as **Abba** - When a person is under the law and living after his own flesh, then he is under a curse. He has put himself there and there is no forgiveness in the law. However, when a person is under grace and he chooses to walk and live that way, he can cry out when he fails because he is not going to be condemned. There is no condemnation of those who are in Christ Jesus, and he can cry out "Abba, Father, I have failed again," and God immediately surrounds him and the forgiveness is his; and he can stand up and continue to walk in the newness of life that God gives to him. We don't have that under law. We have that under grace. Now technically, positionally, it is always ours, but we can refuse it when we choose to do things our own way. One of the beautiful things about my children—and they are in their 30's—when they call me and they are hurting—that's not beautiful—but when they call me they say "daddy," they always say daddy. If they aren't hurting it's "dad," and that's more respectful and that's more adult. But when you're hurting you cry out for daddy, you cry out for daddy. And that's what you have in the relationship. If I choose to walk by faith I enter into the fullness of that relationship even though positionally I have always had it. I get to enjoy it for myself. ([Galatians 4 Commentary-Barber](#))

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## Utley - Excursus on the Relationship of Jesus and the Holy Spirit -

This chapter also further explains the relationship between Jesus and the Holy Spirit (cf. Galatians 4:6):

1. Jesus asks the Father and He sends the Spirit
  - a. Jesus sends the Spirit in Jn 15:26; 16:7
  - b. Jesus spoke out of His unity with the Father, so the Spirit speaks out of His unity with them both
2. "Another of the same kind." The best name for the Spirit is "the other Jesus:"
  - a. **Both "sent" from the Father**
    - (1) Son—Gal. 4:4
    - (2) Spirit—Gal. 4:6
  - b. **Both called "truth"**
    - (1) Son—John 14:6
    - (2) Spirit—John 14:17; 15:26; 16:13
  - c. **Both called "paraclete"**
    - (1) Son—1 John 2:1
    - (2) Spirit—John 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7



d. Spirit called by Jesus' name (NASB)

- (1) Acts 16:7—"The Spirit of Jesus"
- (2) Rom. 8:9—"Spirit of God ... Spirit of Christ"
- (3) 2 Cor. 3:17—"The Lord is Spirit ... the Spirit of the Lord"
- (4) 2 Cor. 3:18—"The Lord, the Spirit"
- (5) Gal. 4:6—"The Spirit of His Son"
- (6) Phil. 1:19—"The Spirit of Jesus Christ"
- (7) 1 Pet. 1:11—"The Spirit of Christ"

e. **Both indwell believers**

- (1) Son—Matt. 28:20; John 14:20, 23; 15:4; 17:23; Rom. 8:10; 2 Cor. 13:5; Gal. 2:20; Eph. 3:17; Col. 1:27
- (2) Spirit—John 14:16–17; Rom. 8:11; 1 Pet. 1:11
- (3) Father—John 14:23; 17:23; 2 Cor. 6:16

f. **Both** described as "holy"

- (1) Spirit—Luke 1:35
- (2) Son—Luke 1:35; 14:26

3. Possible definitions of "helper," "paraclete," John 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7; 1 John 2:1

- a. defense advocate
- b. prosecutor
- c. comforter (the Father gives comfort in 2 Cor. 1:3–7, from the same root word)

4. Throughout the NT the Spirit is often identified in terms linking Him to the ministry of the Son (cf. Acts 16:7; Rom. 8:9; 2 Cor. 3:17–18 and Phil. 1:19). ([Paul's First Letters](#))

### Galatians 4:7 Therefore you are no longer a slave, but a son; and if a son, then an heir through God.

KJV Galatians 4:7 Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.

- **Therefore you are no longer a slave** Galatians 4:1,2,5,6,31; 5:1
- **but a son** Galatians 3:26
- **if a son** Galatians 3:29; Romans 8:16,17
- **then an heir through God.** Genesis 15:1; 17:7,8; Ps 16:5; 73:26; Jeremiah 10:16; 31:33; 32:38-41; Lamentations 3:24; 1 Corinthians 3:21-23; 2 Corinthians 6:16-18; Revelation 21:7
- Galatians 4 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries
- Galatians 4:1-11 - Don Anderson [Galatians Study 7](#); [More Notes on Galatians Study 7](#)
- [Warren Wiersbe's sermon Born Free - Galatians 4](#) - one of the simplest and most profound expositions you will ever hear on Galatians 4!

**Hiebert's Outline - The contrasted position under law and faith** (Galatians 4:1-7) (See context in [An Introduction to the New Testament, Volume 2](#))

- A. The illustration of the position of the heir as a minor (Galatians 4:1-2)
- B. The application of the illustration to believers (Galatians 4:3-6)
  1. The condition of bondage as minors (Galatians 4:3)
  2. The position as free sons through God's Son (Galatians 4:4-6)
    - a. The sending of the Son of God (Galatians 4:4-5)
    - b. The sending of the Spirit of God (Galatians 4:6)
  3. The conclusion for the believer (Galatians 4:7)

**Therefore you are no longer a slave, but a son** - **No longer** is the strongest Greek negative ([ouketi](#) = extension of time up to a point but not beyond) and it means "no more" or "no further." In the New Testament it is used literally when referring to time --"no longer" (Mt 19:6; Lk 15:19), "never again" (Acts 20:25+ = "will no longer see my face"; Ro 6:9+ = "death **no longer** is master over Him"). Paul's point is that the believers in Galatia are **No longer a slave** to sin and Satan but now and forever in right legal standing with God because we are in Christ, His beloved.

**Robertson on a slave** - He changes to the **singular** to drive the point home to each one. The spiritual experience (Gal 3:2-) has set

each one free. Each is now a son and heir. ([Galatians 4 - Robertson's Word Pictures in the New Testament](#))

**Wayne Barber** applies this truth - What are the implications of that statement, “you are no longer a slave, but you are a son,” with full privileges in the family of God? You see, if you’re not enjoying that, perhaps you have to be taught it and you still don’t know it. Even though it’s true, we haven’t yet grasped it. Once we are free from the bondage to the law we are free from slavery. But then we have to learn to live by faith because it is faith that appropriates what is already ours in the Lord Jesus. You know what the Galatians did? They dropped out of the school of grace and they re-enrolled into the kindergarten of law. And how many times in our life have we all done the same thing? When we choose not to live in that intimacy of a relationship, we choose not to say yes to God, we choose not to let His word totally affect our behavior and our life, we choose to enroll one more time in the school of the law, the kindergarten of law. We have a choice today. We have a choice to live as a slave and we have a choice to live as a son. Slaves have no relationship with the Father and they have no relationship with the family. Only by faith do we enjoy those relationships. Even though technically, positionally, they are ours, we don’t enjoy them unless we are willing to live by faith. (ED: And faith is shown by obedience, obedience enabled by the Spirit of grace. See [Obedience of faith](#)) ([Sermon Notes](#))

**And if a son, then an heir through God** - "And since you are his child, everything he has belongs to you." (NLT) Note that the KJV ([Textus Receptus](#)) adds "through Christ." (dia christou). What is Paul saying with the phrase through God? He is emphasizing that God in the sovereign initiator of grace, the very truth declared by Jesus...

“No one can come to Me **unless the Father who sent Me draws him**; and I will raise him up on the last day. (John 6:44, 65)

And He was saying, “For this reason I have said to you, that **no one can come to Me unless it has been granted him from the Father.**” (John 6:65)

**Note** - [What is sovereign grace?](#)

**Utley** notes that **if a son** "is a FIRST CLASS CONDITIONAL SENTENCE, “**since** you are sons” (TEV, NIV) (ED: IN OTHER WORDS THIS CONDITION IS REGARDED AS FULFILLED). The Spirit removes our slavery and bondage and establishes our sonship (cf. Ro 8:12–17). This assures our inheritance. ([Galatians 4](#))

**Peter** writes about our sure inheritance (note the descriptions [see **bold font** below] that reiterate the truth that our inheritance is certain)..

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, **4+** to obtain an **inheritance** which is **imperishable** and **undefiled** and **will not fade away**, **reserved** in heaven for you, **5** who are **protected by the power of God** through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. (1 Peter 1:3–**5+**).

**Warren Wiersbe** comments that "the Galatians wanted their Father to accept them as servants, when they really were sons (Luke 15:18–19). The contrasts are easy to see. For example:

The son has the same nature as the father, but the servant does not. When we trust Christ, the Holy Spirit comes to live within us; and this means we are “partakers of the divine nature” (2 Peter 1:4). The Law could never give a person God’s nature within. All it could do was reveal to the person his desperate need for God’s nature. So, when the believer goes back into Law, he is denying the very divine nature within, and he is giving the old nature (the flesh) opportunity to go to work.

The son has a father, while the servant has a master. No servant could ever say “Father” to his master. When the sinner trusts Christ, he receives the Holy Spirit within, and the Spirit tells him that he is a child of the Father (Rom. 8:15–16). It is natural for a baby to cry, but not for a baby to talk to his father. When the Spirit enters the heart, He says, “Abba, Father” (Gal. 4:6); and, in response, the believer cries, “Abba, Father!” (Rom. 8:15) The word Abba is an Aramaic word that is the equivalent of our English word “papa.” This shows the closeness of the child to the Father. No servant has this.

The son obeys out of love, while the servant obeys out of fear. The Spirit works in the heart of the believer to quicken and increase his love for God. “The fruit of the Spirit is love” (Gal. 5:22). “The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy [Spirit]” (Rom. 5:5). The Judaizers told the Galatians that they would become better Christians by submitting to the Law, but the Law can never produce obedience. Only love can do that. “If ye love Me, keep My commandments” (John 14:15).

The son is rich, while the servant is poor. We are both “sons and heirs.” And since we are adopted—placed as adult sons in the family—we may begin drawing on our inheritance right now. God has made available to us



the riches of His grace (Eph. 1:7; 2:7), the riches of His glory (Phil. 4:19), the riches of His goodness (Rom. 2:4), and the riches of His wisdom (Rom. 11:33ff)—and all of the riches of God are found in Christ (Col. 1:19; 2:3).

The son has a future, while the servant does not. While many kind masters did provide for their slaves in old age, it was not required of them. The father always provides for the son (2 Cor. 12:14).

In one sense, our adoption is not yet final, because we are awaiting the return of Christ and the redemption of our bodies (Rom. 8:23). Some scholars think that this second stage in our adoption corresponds to the Roman practice when a man adopted someone outside his family to be his son. First there was a private ceremony at which the son was purchased; then there was a public ceremony at which the adoption was declared openly before the officials.

Christians have experienced the first stage: we have been purchased by Christ and indwelt by the Spirit. We are awaiting the second stage: the public declaration at the return of Christ when “we shall be like Him” (1 John 3:1–3). We are “sons and heirs,” and the best part of our inheritance is yet to come (see 1 Peter 1:1–5). (See context in [The Bible Exposition Commentary](#) or borrow [Be Free: An Expository Study of Galatians](#))

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## God's Heirs

Read: Galatians 3:26-4:7

You are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ. —Galatians 4:7

When friends of ours considered having an orphan from another country come to live with their family, they prayerfully faced their feelings about many issues. To bring the child into the US, they would have to adopt her, giving her the same rights and status as their own children. She would become one of their heirs.

They were not unwilling to share what they had, but they struggled with the long-term implications of what they were about to do. To care for a foster child is a compassionate, unselfish undertaking. But to choose to adopt is an even more serious responsibility.

Isn't it amazing that in His eternal plan, God chose to adopt us as His sons and daughters in Christ? Giving us more than care and compassion, God has made us His heirs. The Bible says that Christ redeemed us “that we might receive the adoption as sons. . . . And if a son, then an heir of God through Christ” (Gal. 4:5,7). What do we inherit? All the riches of God's mercy, grace, and love, as well as His presence and His peace. We inherit a relationship with Him now and forever.

What a privilege to be adopted—a child by choice—an heir in the family of God! By David C. McCasland [Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

Worthy? Oh, no! The marvel of it is  
That I should know such boundless love as this!  
And so, I'm rich; with Christ I am joint heir,  
Since He once stooped my poverty to share.  
—Young

When you receive Christ, you become an heir to the riches of heaven.

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## Living Royally

You are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ. —Galatians 4:7

Today's Scripture: Galatians 3:19-4:7

There is an ancient story about a man named Astyages who determined to do away with a royal infant named Cyrus. He summoned an officer of his court and told him to kill the baby prince. The officer in turn delivered the youngster to a herdsman with instructions that he should take him high up into the mountains where the baby would die from exposure.

The herdsman and his wife, however, took the child and raised him as their own. Growing up in the home of those humble peasants, he naturally thought they were his real parents. He was ignorant of his royal birth and his kingly lineage. Because he thought he was a peasant, he lived like one.

Many Christians fail to realize the royal heritage that is theirs in Christ. They live as spiritual peasants when they should be living royally. According to the apostle Paul, believers “are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:26). He also said,

“Because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, ‘Abba, Father!’ Therefore you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ” (4:6-7).

God has given us everything we need to live victorious, fulfilling lives. Let’s not live like peasants. By Richard DeHaan [Our Daily Bread](#). Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved)

Reflect & Pray

Rejoice—the Lord is King!  
Your Lord and King adore!  
Rejoice, give thanks, and sing  
And triumph evermore.  
—Wesley

God has given all we need  
For life and godliness,  
But we still have to put to use  
The gifts that we possess.  
—Sper

A child of the King should reflect his Father’s character.

**Galatians 4:8 However at that time, when you did not know God, you were slaves to those which by nature are no gods.**

KJV Galatians 4:8 Howbeit then, when ye knew not God, ye did service unto them which by nature are no gods.

- **However at that time** Ex 5:2; Jer 10:25; Jn 1:10; Acts 17:23,30; Ro 1:28; 1 Cor 1:21; Eph 2:11,12; 4:18; 1 Th 4:5; 2 Th 1:8; 1 Jn 3:1
- **when you did not know God** Josh 24:2,15; Ps 115:4-8; 135:15-18; Isa 44:9-20; Jer 10:3-16; Acts 14:12; 17:29; Ro 1:23; 1 Cor 8:4; 10:19,20; 12:2; 1 Th 1:9; 1 Pe 4:3
- Galatians 4 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries
- Galatians 4:1-11 - Don Anderson [Galatians Study 7](#); [More Notes on Galatians Study 7](#);
- [Warren Wiersbe's sermon Born Free - Galatians 4](#) - one of the simplest and most profound expositions you will ever hear on Galatians 4!

### III. Paul now begins his appeal to his readers to drop their legalism (Galatians 4:8-31)

A. The acceptance of Jewish legalism is a return to bondage (Galatians 4:8-11)

- i. Their past condition of bondage (Galatians 4:8)
- ii. Their present deliverance from bondage (Galatians 4:9a)
- iii. Their legalism as a return to bondage (Galatians 4:9b-10)
- iv. Their action a cause of concern to him (Galatians 4:11)

B. The appeal from his relations to them (Galatians 4:12-20)

- i. The appeal for them to adopt his position (Galatians 4:12a)
- ii. The reminder of his past relations to them (Galatians 4:12b-14)
- iii. The change in their relation to him (Galatians 4:15-18)
- iv. The travail he is undergoing for them (Galatians 4:19-20)

C. The appeal from the two contrasted covenants (Galatians 4:21-31)

- i. The question to those desiring to be under law (Galatians 4:21)
- ii. The story of Abraham’s two sons (Galatians 4:22-23)
- iii. The allegorical interpretation of the story (Galatians 4:24-30)
  - a. The two mothers representing two covenants (Galatians 4:24a)
  - b. The description of the two covenants (Galatians 4:24b-28)

1. The one representing a covenant of bondage (Galatians 4:24b-25)
  2. The other representing a covenant of freedom (Galatians 4:26-28)
- c. The expulsion of the slave woman and her son (Galatians 4:29-30)

IV. The conclusion from the story (Galatians 4:31)

## REMEMBER YOUR FORMER HOPELESS STATE

In this verse Paul begins to make his appeal and begins with appealing to their memory. That is always a good place to begin, because we all are so prone to wander, so quick to forget God's past great mercies and grace! We need to be like the Israelites when they crossed the Jordan into the promised land and were instructed to set up [stones of remembrance](#) (read Josh 4:3, 6,7), so that when they saw these stones in the future, they would remember God's grace in bringing them across the dry river bed of the raging Jordan and into the land of milk and honey. Believers have been brought into the "promised land" in Christ, and we need to frequent the site of our stones of remembrance because our fallen flesh causes us to forget (and often very quickly!)

**John Stott** summarizes Paul's appeal - His argument is this: 'If you were a slave and are now a son, if you did not know God but have now come to know Him and to be known by Him, how can you turn back again to the old slavery? How can you allow yourself to be enslaved by the very elemental spirits from whom Jesus Christ has rescued you?' (See context in [The Message of Galatians](#) )

Before his readers were saved by grace through faith, they were hopeless (and helpless). Writing to the Ephesians Paul said

remember that you were at that time separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, **having no hope** and without God in the world.<sup>13</sup> But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. (Eph 2:12<sup>+</sup>)

**However at that time - At what time?** When you were enslaved to Sin and Satan, before you were saved by grace through faith (Eph 2:8-9<sup>+</sup>). Before the "wind" of the Spirit swept in bringing regeneration (Titus 3:5-7<sup>+</sup>) and rebirth (Jn 3:3-8), that terrible time in your pagan past when you lived as a slaves to your flesh. Paul gives a "multi-colored" description of this ugly past writing that "we also once were foolish ourselves, disobedient, deceived, enslaved to various lusts and pleasures, spending our life in malice and envy, hateful, hating one another." (Titus 3:3<sup>+</sup>). That's the way they had behaved when they did not know God.

**When you did not know God - Not** is the negative particle ou which signifies not "relative" negation but absolute negation. You absolutely **did not know God!** **Know** is [perfect tense](#) indicating this was there settled state/condition for when they were born, they were spiritually dead in Adam (born into his "race" of sinners - Ro 5:12<sup>+</sup>). They were born with a sinful predisposition which caused them to sin and to hide from God and even to be hostile toward Him (cf Col 1:21<sup>+</sup>). You had knowledge of the so-called gods but missed the truth of the one and only true and living God. The only way to **know God** is to know Christ. No Christ, no hope! John writes "No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him." (Jn 1:18, cf Jn 14:9, 10, 11) And as Jesus declared "This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ Whom You have sent." (Jn 17:3)

**Know** (1492)([eido, oida](#) - eido is used only in the [perfect tense](#) = oida) means in general to know by perception. **Eido/oida** is distinguished from [ginosko](#) (epiginosko, epignosis - the other major NT word group for knowing) because [ginosko](#) generally refers to knowledge obtained by experience or "experiential knowledge". On the other hand, **eido/oida** often refers more to an intuitive knowledge, although this distinction is not always clear cut. **Eido/oida** is not so much that which is known by experience as an intuitive insight that is drilled into one's heart. **Eido/oida** is a perception, a being aware of, an understanding, an intuitive knowledge which in the case of believers can only be given by the Holy Spirit. And so **eido/oida** suggests fullness of knowledge, absolute knowledge (that which is without a doubt), rather than a progress in knowledge (cp ginoko).

**Barber** asks "Now what he's talking about, "**when you did not know God,**" refers back to when they weren't believers. It wasn't talking about when they didn't know *about* God, really. But he is talking about, they knew about Him (Ed: As everyone has a sense that there is a God), but he is talking about when they didn't know Him **intimately**. He uses a particular Greek word here. It is [oida](#). But it means to intuitively know someone. A little baby intuitively knows the sound of his mother's voice. It's something intuitive. He doesn't have to go to school to learn it. It's something that's given to him." ([Galatians 4 Commentary-Barber](#))

**Utley** writes that "It is true that all humans have the potential of knowing God both from creation (Ps. 19:1-5 and Ro 1:19-20) and also an inner moral witness (cf. Ro 2:14-15). This knowledge is called natural revelation, but the Bible asserts that all of us, Jews and Gentiles, have rejected this knowledge (cf. Rom. 3:23). "Know" is used both in its Hebrew sense of interpersonal, intimate, family relationships and its Greek sense of cognitive content but the focus here is on the Greek sense as verse 9 is on the Hebrew

sense." ([Galatians 4](#))

Paul describes their former miserable state in Adam...

So this I say, and affirm together with the Lord, that you walk no longer just as the Gentiles also walk, in the futility of their mind, 18 being darkened in their understanding, **excluded from the life of God** because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart; 19 and they, having become callous, have given themselves over to sensuality for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness. (Eph 4:17-19)

And even if our gospel is veiled, it is **veiled to those who are perishing**, 4 in whose case **the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving** so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. (2 Cor 4:3-4)

Every unredeemed person is enslaved whether they know it or not - to their flesh, to the devil and to the fallen world system (see the [world](#), the [flesh](#) and the [devil](#))

In Acts 14:11-13+ Luke records how the pagans were in bondage to false gods such as Zeus and Hermes, "mute (dumb) idols" that were "nothings" and could say nothing! Now just as these pagans they had worshiped idols of wood and stone which were no gods, now they were turning to another type of bondage, bondage to the law. **Wiersbe** adds "Now they were abandoning their liberty in Christ and going back into bondage. They were "dropping out" of the school of grace and enrolling in the kindergarten of Law! They were destroying all the good work the Lord had done in them through Paul's ministry." (Borrow [Be Free: An Expository Study of Galatians](#))

**You were slaves to those which by nature are no gods- You were** ([aorist tense](#)) = past tense. "**B.C.**" that is **before Christ** became your Lord (Ro 10:9-10+) and your life (Col 3:4+). Paul reminds them of their [abject](#) enslavement to so-called gods (PLURAL) that do not even exist! This is clearly a reference to idolatry which was the prevalent practice of the polytheistic pagans. Paul is reminding them of the absurdity of their former allegiance to what was in essence "vanity" (emptiness, futility). He takes them back to the days of living in bondage. This statement does beg the question - if they were not **gods**, then to what were they enslaved. The implication is that they were enslaved to the demonic influences that were behind these "no gods" as Paul alluded to in his first letter to the Corinthians...

Therefore concerning the eating of things sacrificed to idols, we know that **there is no such thing as an idol in the world**, and that **there is no God but one**. (IN OTHER WORDS IDOLS DO NOT REPRESENT REAL "GODS") 5 For even if there are so-called gods whether in heaven or on earth, as indeed there are many gods and many lords, (1 Cor 8:4-5)

What do I mean then? That a thing sacrificed to idols is anything, or that an idol is anything? 20 No, but I say that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, **they sacrifice to demons and not to God**; and I do not want you to become sharers in demons. (1 Cor 10:19-20)

**Barber** on idols - Anything that is an idol is nothing more than pure flesh. And if we want to put it in simplistic terms for us today to get anything out of what Paul is saying here, he is saying, remember when you were lost and you used to serve the idols that your flesh came up with, whatever that was? Maybe it was your job. Maybe it was power. Maybe it was money. Maybe it was something else, but you were a servant before you got saved to some kind of pagan idol. ([Galatians 4 Commentary-Barber](#))

Addressing the intelligentsia in Athens (where there were many so-called gods, even one called the "unknown god" just to make sure they did not miss any!)

Being then the children of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and thought of man.(Acts 17:29+)

Compare what happens to men when they suppress the truth about God (Ro 1:18+) which is evident in them (Ro 1:19+) and has been clearly revealed to them (Ro 1:20-21+)

Professing to be wise, they became fools, 23 and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image (IDOLATRY) in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures. (Ro 1:22-23+)

**You were slaves** (1398)([douleuo](#) from **doulos** = slave in bondage (to another, in state of being completely controlled by someone or something) means to be in bondage or in the position of servant and to act accordingly, dutifully obeying the master's commands. The verb means to serve as a slave, with all personal ownership-rights assigned to the owner, in this cause those who are **no gods!**

In 1 Cor 12:2 Paul alludes to their enslavement writing...

"You know that when you were pagans, you were led astray (ONE GETS THE PICTURE OF SLAVES LED BY A CHAIN AROUND THEIR NECK!) to the mute (SPEECHLESS) idols, however you were led.

**Nature** (5449)(**phusis/physics** from **phuo** = to bring forth. **Physis** gives us our root for the English word **physics**, study of the laws of nature) means natural condition, natural order, essence. **Phusis** is "that which belongs to a thing by virtue of its origin," and so "its essential character," which in this case is **no gods!**

**Barber** adds that phusis is "used in Galatians 2:15+ when Paul says "**We are Jews by nature.**" And he says those **gods** you served back before you became a believer, they didn't have any nature of God in them. There was nothing divine about them." ([Galatians 4 Commentary-Barber](#))

**John MacArthur** - Several years ago, I visited a very large Buddhist shrine. Scores of men and women, and even some children, were bowing down to a giant stone image of Buddha, reciting prescribed prayers, going through various incantations, and making offerings of incense and food. My heart broke because of their spiritual darkness and hopelessness. I wanted to shout, "Why are you doing all this? Don't you know that image is only a piece of stone carved by men? There is no god here. Buddha can't help you. He himself is long dead—physically and spiritually—and will eternally remain dead. If you continue to trust in him, you too will die and forever remain dead." There are many false gods men put their trust in, but none can save. While those people were pitiable because of their ignorance of God, they were also condemned because of their rebelliousness against God. (See Ro 1:19-21, Ro 1:25).

**John Stott** comments that "By the grace of God we must determine to **remember** what once we were and never to return to it; to remember what God has made us and to conform our lives to it. A good example of this is John Newton. He was an only child and lost his mother when he was seven years old. He went to sea at the tender age of eleven and later became involved, 'in the words of one of his biographers, 'in the unspeakable atrocities of the African slave trade'. He plumbed the depths of human sin and degradation. When he was twenty-three, on 10 March 1748, when his ship was in imminent peril of foundering in a terrific storm, he cried to God for mercy, and he found it. He was truly converted, and he never forgot how God had had mercy upon him, a former blasphemer. He sought diligently to remember what he had previously been, and what God had done for him. In order to imprint it on his memory, he had written in bold letters and fastened across the wall over the mantelpiece of his study the words of Deuteronomy 15:15: 'Thou shalt remember that thou wast a bondman (a slave) in the land of Egypt, and the Lord thy God redeemed thee.' If only we remembered these things, what we once were and what we now are, we would have an increasing desire within us to live accordingly, to be what we are, namely sons of God set free by Christ. (See context [The Message of Galatians](#))

The believers in Galatia were not like John Newton and thus failed to remember what great things God had done in their lives!

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**Spurgeon** - Knowledge of God Creates Abhorrence of Idols - Paul tells the Galatians in 4:8 that when they did not know God, they served them which by nature are no gods. But when they knew God, or rather were known by Him, they turned from their idols at once. A knowledge of God creates an abhorrence of idols, especially of those that have enslaved our own hearts. It seems most monstrous that the ancient Greeks and Romans could have worshiped the deities that their poets invented for them, and yet at this very time men imagine for themselves a god such as they would choose, and then they worship this god of their own fabrication. Only let the Lord reveal Himself to the soul. Let the heart know the true God, and away these idols go; with loathing they are cast to the moles and to the bats. God so enamors the soul of the converted man, so engrosses every spiritual faculty, that he cannot endure an idol, however dear in former times. If perchance in some backsliding moment an earthly love intrudes, it is because the man has withdrawn his eye from the splendor of the Deity (**ED**: See "[Expulsive Power of a New Affection](#)"). When once he gets his eye back again to the God of love, then Dagon falls before the ark of the Lord (1 Sa 5:3-4), and not so much as the stump thereof is left. Blessed Lord, let us know you, for then we shall know our idols no more.

**Galatians 4:9 But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how is it that you turn back again to the weak and worthless elemental things, to which you desire to be enslaved all over again?**

KJV Galatians 4:9 But now, after that ye have known God, or rather are known of God, how turn ye again to the weak and beggarly elements, whereunto ye desire again to be in bondage?

- **That you have come to know God** 1 Kings 8:43; 1 Chronicles 28:9; Ps 9:10; Pr 2:5; Jer 31:34; Hab 2:14; Matthew 11:27; John 17:3; 1 Cor 15:34; 2 Cor 4:6; Eph 1:17; 2 Pe 2:20; 1 Jn 2:3,4; 5:20
- **rather to be known by God** Ex 33:17; Ps 1:6; Jn 10:14,27; Romans 8:29; 1 Corinthians 8:3; 13:12; 2 Timothy 2:19
- **how is it that you turn back again** Gal 3:3; Romans 8:3; Colossians 2:20-23; Hebrews 7:18

- **turn back again** Hebrews 10:38,39
- Galatians 4 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries
- Galatians 4:1-11 - Don Anderson [Galatians Study 7](#); [More Notes on Galatians Study 7](#)
- [Warren Wiersbe's sermon Born Free - Galatians 4](#) - one of the simplest and most profound expositions you will ever hear on Galatians 4!

## THE ENIGMA OF KNOWING GOD BUT TURNING BACK

**Enigma** means something that baffles understanding and can't be readily explained or understood. It describes something that is a puzzling and even inexplicable.

In Galatians 4:8 Paul reminded his readers of their hopeless, helpless condition outside of Christ, a truth echoed in Ephesians 2:12. And then Paul opened the gates of heaven and hope writing

**But now** in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off (AND WITHOUT HOPE) have been brought near by the blood of Christ. (Eph 2:13+)

**But now** - This is one of those great "but now's" in the Bible (cf Ro 3:21, Ro 6:22, Ro 7:6, Ro 11:30, Eph 2:13, Eph 5:8, 2 Ti 1:10, 1 Pet 2:10). This is both a dramatic term of contrast and a [time phrase](#) (contrasts with Gal 4:8 "However at that time"), from those who were slaves to an "unknown god" (so to speak) to those who are sons knowing God through His Son Jesus Christ.

**That you have come to know God** - "come to know by experience through faith in Christ." ([Robertson](#)) They did not just know about God, but they knew Him personally and intimately and enjoyed fellowship with the Holy One of Israel. This is salvation from the man's perspective. The more important knowing is to be known by God, which is salvation from His perspective! Without His "perspective," man would have not "perspective" regarding salvation!

John speaks of us knowing God the Son

And we know that the Son of God has come, and has given us understanding ([dianoia](#)) (NOTE GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY IN SALVATION - WE KNOW BECAUSE HE GIVES US THE ABILITY TO UNDERSTAND) **so that we may know** ([ginosko](#) - experientially) Him Who is true; and we are in Him ([IN COVENANT, IN ONENESS, IN IDENTIFICATION WITH HIM](#)) Who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life. (1 John 5:20+)

**Know...know** (1097)([ginosko](#)) involves experiential knowledge, not merely the accumulation of known facts. The idea is to know intimately, experientially and personally. Knowledge possessed through the intellectual process of learning is one thing. Knowledge gained by experience, by an active relationship between the one who knows and the person or thing known, is far superior to the former. [Ginosko](#) describes the latter and is what every Christ follower has experienced as their personal, permanent possession regarding the Person of Christ (e.g., see [ginosko](#) in Jn 8:32, Jn 17:3, Php 3:10+).

**Barber** on "Come to know God" notes that "the word for knowing God is to experience Him, [ginosko](#). It's a different word than **know** ([oida](#)) in Gal 4:8. It means to know Him by experience. And it's in the [aorist tense](#) and it's [active voice](#). It means there was a time when this event took place in your life. You experienced God. You knew Him the very moment you bowed in faith before Him. That was a knowing of God. Isn't that awesome! I got to tap into and actually experience the God that created the air that I breathe. I got to know Him and experience Him the moment I bowed and received Him as my Savior. ([Sermon](#))

**McGee** - "Known of God" actually means approved of God or to be acknowledged of God. They had come to Christ through faith and God accepts that. Most of the believers in the Galatian churches were Gentiles. Now that they were Christians, they were turning to the Mosaic Law, which is, as Paul says, like going back into the idolatry they came out of. (See context [Thru the Bible Vol. 46: The Epistles Galatians](#)).

Paul places the emphasis on **God knowing us** rather than us knowing God, which is similar to John's declaration. We could only come to know God because He first knew us! And why did God know us? Because He loved us as John says...

In this is love, **not that we loved God**, but that **He loved us** and (NOTE THAT "LOVE" IS AN ACTION VERB - BECAUSE GOD...) sent His Son to be the propitiation ([hilasmos](#) = God's wrath is satisfied by the Son's sacrifice for it was "paid in full" or [tetelestai](#) - cf Jn 19:30+) for our sins. (1 John 4:10+)

**Or rather to be known by God** - This is the key, that God knows them (and us). God initiated their salvation having even "sent forth the Spirit of His Son into " their hearts (Gal 4:6). No man "seeks for God." (Ro 3:11). God seeks sinful men, just as He sought Saul on the Damascus Road, while Saul was seeking to persecute disciples of Jesus (Read Acts 9:1-6+) And what should cause us daily



to be thankful is the true that "He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world." (Eph 1:4+). This is amazing grace indeed!

Jesus spoke of the importance of one being **known by God** when He gave one of the most stern and frightening warnings in all of Scripture...

"Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' (THEY CLAIM TO "KNOW" GOD - THEY CLAIM JESUS AS LORD BUT REALLY THEY ARE THE "LORD" OF THEIR LIVES) will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does (present tense - as one's lifestyle, not perfection, but direction...toward Heaven, not Hell!) the will of My Father Who is in heaven will enter. 22 "Many (NOTE THIS ADJECTIVE - NOT JUST A FEW) will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' (AGAIN THEY CLAIM TO "KNOW" JESUS BUT THEN THE [JUDGE BANGS HIS GAVEL](#) AND DECLARES THEIR SENTENCE - AN ETERNAL LIFE SENTENCE TO SPIRITUAL DEATH!) 23 "And then I will declare to them, 'I never (GREEK NEGATIVE MEANS NEVER AT ANY TIME) knew you; DEPART (COMMAND IN [aorist imperative](#) - DO THIS NOW!) FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE ([ergazomai](#) in [present tense](#) = THEY CONTINUALLY ACTIVELY WORK AT ACCOMPLISHING) LAWLESSNESS.'(Mt 7:21-23+)

**THOUGHT** - Dear reader, do you truly know Jesus, or better yet does He truly know you as His own possession (Titus 2:14)? If not "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved" (Acts 16:31+)

The question is now that you are free in Christ and are "adults" (spiritually speaking as discussed in Gal 4:1-7) through your faith in Christ, why do you want to revert to your childhood servitude under the law? Why would you want to go back into slavery to the [world](#), the [flesh](#) and the [devil](#)?

**How is it that you turn back again to the weak and worthless elemental things**- Bengel on Paul's "How" - "A question full of wonder!" I would add and also full of shock and sadness. And remember given the context that these are individuals **known by God**, then they are genuine believers. And yet they have been tempted to **turn** from the truth that liberates to the lies that enslave.

**Wayne Barber** on **turn back** - Now why does Paul bring this up, because these are believers? He brings it up because the Galatian believers had chosen rather than to walk in the fullness of the promises, rather than to enjoy the full adult privileges of being intimate with the Father, and walking daily with Him, they have chosen to go back to what their flesh has come up with. They have chosen what can give them nothing but despair, frustration. Paul has been there before himself and he says, why, why would you go back to a slavery that you have been set free from?...Let me ask you a question. Are you living as a slave or are you living as a son? If you are living as a son, the character of Jesus is being manifested in your life. He's motivating your life. He's moving your life. He's presenting His presence in your life. If you are not, you've got something you have attached yourself to and chosen to become its slave. And it's what is driving you. It's what is framing your mindset. That's what Paul is trying to get across to the Galatians. He's not down on them, he's frustrated. He's trying to get them back to the place that God would have them to be. ([Galatians 4 Commentary-Barber](#))

**Guzik** on **turn back again** - In turning to legalism, the Galatians were not turning to a new error, but coming back to an old one – the idea of a works relationship with God. ([Galatians 4 – Heirs and Slaves, Grace and Law](#))

**Warren Wiersbe** writes that "One of the tragedies of **legalism** is that it gives the appearance of spiritual maturity (**ED**: see Col 2:23+) when, in reality, it leads the believer back into a 'second childhood' of Christian experience." (See context [Be Free - Galatians](#)) [Exchange Legalism for True Spirituality](#) or borrow [Be Free: An Expository Study of Galatians](#))

**Wayne Barber** says the truths Paul is discussing beg the question - "Are you—now draw a circle around yourself and forget that anybody else is here, but just draw that circle and say—am I living as a slave or am I living as a son? Have I chosen to say yes to God?" ([Galatians 4 Commentary-Barber](#))

**Turn back** (1994)([epistrepho](#) from **epi** = motion toward + **strepho** = twist, turn quite around or reverse) means to revert, to turn about, to turn around, to turn toward, to return and figuratively to convert (as in Jn 12:40, 1 Th 1:9+, 1 Pe 2:25+). The [passive voice](#) in Galatians 4:9 indicates that the turning "force" comes from outside of themselves so to speak, and in context is the attractive force of **the weak and worthless elemental things**. The present tense depicts the readers as in the process of turning.

**John Stott** paraphrased the thought: "If you were a slave and are now a son, if you did not know God but have now come to know Him and to be known by Him, how can you turn back again to the old slavery? How can you allow yourself to be enslaved by the very elemental spirits from whom Jesus Christ has rescued you?" (See [The Message of Galatians](#))

**Wayne Barber** - We have already determined that elemental means ABC's, means religion. Why would you go back to religion which requires performance, and performance is nothing that God accepts? The word for "weak" is the word *asthenes*. It means it has no strength; it has no inherent power. Have you ever tried to go back to some religious performance mentality and realized

there's nothing here? You can have your quiet time till you fall over in the floor, but if you're not there to meet God out of love for Him, it's not going to do a thing in the world for you, but just suck some time out of your life. That's all it's going to do. You can give your tithe to the church, and you can do that and do that and do that. It can become so mechanical all you end up is broke. It hasn't done any good. It's weak. It's not in the doing. He said the doing isn't the key. It's the becoming. And he says all religion offers is weak....Your ideas, your religion, your system, your rules, your regulations, he says all that is, they are weak, and they are worthless, and you have desired—it blows me away—you have chosen, you have committed yourself to going back to the very thing Jesus has freed you from. ([Galatians 4 Commentary-Barber](#))

How was the religious system they were turning back to **weak**? It had no power to justify in the first place. Of course once justified by faith they continued in that state. But Paul wants them to recall that before they were justified, all their "religious works" had accomplished nothing in regard to their being declared righteous before a holy God! Their former religious practices were also **weak** because they provided no supernatural power of living, for progressive growth in Christ-likeness (cf Gal 3:3+).

**Warren Wiersbe** adds "They were giving up the **power** of the Gospel for the weakness of Law, and the **wealth** of the Gospel for the poverty of Law. The Law never made anybody rich or powerful; on the contrary, the Law could only reveal man's weakness and spiritual bankruptcy. **No wonder Paul weeps over these believers, as he sees them abandon liberty for bondage, power for weakness, and wealth for poverty.**" (See context [The Wiersbe Bible Commentary](#) or borrow [Be Free: An Expository Study of Galatians](#))

**William MacDonald** - Paul labels the law and all its ceremonies as weak and beggarly. God's laws were beautiful in their time and place, but they are positive hindrances when substituted for the Lord Jesus. It is idolatry to turn from Christ to law. (See context in [Believer's Bible Commentary](#))

**Weak** (helpless) (772)([asthenes](#) from **a** = without + **sthénos** = strength, bodily vigor, cf [astheneo](#)) is literally without strength or bodily vigor. **Asthenes** describes one's state of limited capacity to do or be something and is used literally of physical weakness (most of the uses in the Gospels) and here in Galatians 4:9 is used figuratively of weakness in the spiritual arena (weak flesh, weak conscience, weak religious system or commandment [Gal 4:9, Heb 7:18], etc) and thus describes powerlessness to produce spiritually fruitful or spiritually positive results.

**Worthless** ("beggarly")(4434)([ptochos](#) from **ptosso** = crouch, cringe, cower down or hide oneself for fear, a picture of one crouching and cowering like a beggar with a tin cup to receive the pennies dropped in!) is an adjective which describes one who crouches and cowers and is used as a noun to mean **beggar** so poor as to be unable to meet one's basic needs and forced to depend on others or on society. Classical Greek used **ptochos** to refer to a person reduced to total destitution, who crouched in a corner begging. As he held out one hand for alms he often hid his face with the other hand, because he was ashamed of being recognized. Beloved, what a word picture of those who know God and who were slaves, who now would make the choice of their will to become "beggars" so to speak.

**THOUGHT** - **Legalism** steals and makes one spiritually impoverished for it counters (and [negates](#)) the wonderful work of free grace. Examine your life. Do you have any "*legalistic tendencies*"? If you do, then rest assured, they will make a spiritual "beggar" if you continue to practice them. James 1:25+ gives the antidote describing "one who looks intently at the perfect law, **the law of liberty**, and abides by it (ENABLED BY THE HOLY SPIRIT NOT THE FALLEN FLESH - SEE Gal 3:3+), not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer (UNDER GRACE NOT LAW - cf Ro 6:14+), this man will be blessed in what he does."

**Elemental things** (4747) see preceding discussion of [stoicheion](#). This probably refers to basic "elements" of human religion and ritual. The same word is used in Col 2:8+ in Paul's warning to the saints...

See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles ([stoicheion](#)) of the world, rather than according to Christ.

**John MacArthur** on **elemental things** - Both Jewish religion and Gentile religion centered on man-made systems of works. They were filled with laws and ceremonies to be performed so as to achieve divine acceptance. (See context in [The MacArthur Study Bible](#) or borrow [The MacArthur Study Bible](#))

**MacArthur's** assessment would fit with the context of the following passage describing "rituals" the readers were practicing. Ritual will never get you in a closer relationship with Jesus, for what Samuel declared is still true "to obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed than the fat of rams." (1 Sa 15:22).

**Spurgeon** - How can ye go back to the things of your spiritual childhood? As well may full-grown men begin again to read their A B C, and learn from baby picture books!

**Utley** comments that "Both Judaism and paganism were subject to the **stoicheia**! These fallen world structures are completely



inadequate to bring salvation." (**Ed:** Or to bring about ongoing sanctification!) ([Galatians 4](#))

**Robertson on elemental things** - The same stoicheia in Gal 4:3+ from which they had been delivered, "weak and beggarly," still in their utter impotence from the Pharisaic legalism and the philosophical and religious legalism and the philosophical and religious quests of the heathen...as shown by Angus's The Religious Quests of the Graeco-Roman World. These were eagerly pursued by many, but they were shadows when caught. It is pitiful today to see some men and women leave Christ for [will o' the wisps](#) of false philosophy." ([Galatians 4 - Robertson's Word Pictures in the New Testament](#))

**To which you desire to be enslaved all over again?** - Paul's logic is flawless, as he paints for them the picture of their foolishness to desire to go backward rather than forward and to trade the slavery of paganism (from which the Gospel had liberated them) for the slavery of Jewish legalism as a means of salvation (and sanctification - see verse below). It is not only foolish, but not even logical! But their problem was that they had been "bewitched" as Paul wrote earlier

You **foolish** ([anoetos](#)) Galatians (not lacking intelligence, but lacking in obedience), who ([REFERRING TO THE JUDAIZERS](#)) has bewitched ([baskaino](#) in [aorist tense](#), [indicative mood](#) = this actually had happened - THEY HAD BEEN "CHARMED"/MISLED BY LIES) you, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed ([prographo](#) = POSTING OFFICIAL NOTICES IN PUBLIC PLACES - WHICH OCCURRED WITH PAUL'S PREACHING OF THE GOSPEL) as crucified? 2 This is the only thing I want to find out from you: did you receive the Spirit by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith? (OF COURSE A RHETORICAL QUESTION - ANSWER = BY FAITH NOT WORKS!) 3 Are you so **foolish** ([anoetos](#))? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected ([present tense](#) = SPEAKS OF [PROGRESSIVE SANCTIFICATION](#)) by the flesh? (Gal 3:1-3+)

In a similar passage, the writer of Hebrews warns his Jewish hearers who have heard the truth about Jesus and seem to have initially received that truth by faith...

BUT MY RIGHTEOUS ONE SHALL LIVE BY FAITH; AND IF HE SHRINKS BACK, MY SOUL HAS NO PLEASURE IN HIM. 39 But we are not of those who shrink back to destruction, but of those who have faith to the preserving of the soul. (Hebrews 10:38,39+)

The writer of Hebrews is not saying a truly saved person can lose their salvation. He is saying that faith that endures (as when trials and afflictions and temptations come) to the end is the type of faith that truly saves a person. And then he goes on in Hebrews 11 to take his readers through the "Hall of Faith" showing numerous Old Testament saints who exhibited this quality of enduring faith.

**John Witmer on elemental things** - Hendriksen notes that Luther commented on this verse and applied the lesson to his own day, observing that some monks were zealously laboring to please God for salvation. However, the more they worked the more miserable, uncertain, and fearful they became. Hendriksen adds: "**People who prefer the law to the gospel are like Aesop's dog who let go of the meat to snatch at the shadow in the water.... The law is weak and poor, the sinner is weak and poor: two feeble beggars trying to help each other. They cannot do it. They only wear each other out. But through Christ a weak and poor sinner is revived and enriched unto eternal life.**" (Twenty-First Century Biblical Commentary Series – The Books of Galatians & Ephesians: By Grace through Faith)

The key phrase is **desire** which indicates they made the choice to do this. They were not forced to go back into slavery. They actually chose to do it!

**THOUGHT** - Does not this describe all of us when we choose to carry out some willful sin? Why do we do it? Because we DESIRE it? And so we sin with impunity and presumption (cf Ps 19:13). Sounds a lot like Achan in Joshua 7:21 (He saw, he coveted, he took, he concealed - we try to hide our willful sin!). We know it is wrong and yet we do it! We know it can potentially enslave us (cf Pr 5:22 = "he will be held with the cords of his sin", cf 2 Pe 2:19, 20) and yet we commit the sin with "eyes wide open." (Really with spiritual eyes totally shut! Totally deceived!)

**Desire** (Want, Will, Wish) ([2309](#))([thelo](#)) primarily refers to exercising of one's will with the underlying sense of to be willing, to desire, to want or to wish. Vine adds that **thelo** "expresses not simply a desire, but a determined and constant exercise of the will." In Galatians 4:9 **thelo** is in the [present tense](#) (they continually desire) and [active voice](#) which signifies they are making a volitional choice, a definite choice of their will to make the turn! And the [indicative mood](#) of **thelo** indicates this is a reality. In other words, this is not an accidental occurrence! Paul says you are making a willful turning from truth to error.

**To be enslaved** ([present tense](#) ~ continually)([1398](#)) see discussion above on [douleuo](#)

**John Stott** wrote "We cannot come to Christ to be justified until we have first been to Moses to be condemned. But once we have gone to Moses, and acknowledged our sin, guilt and condemnation, we must not stay there. We must let Moses send us to Christ."

(Quoted by [MacArthur](#)) The Judaizers were taking them back to Moses!

**Bruce Barton** - Religious slavery (trying to please God by legalism or works) is particularly devastating to people because it offers false hope. Thinking they will gain freedom, they instead get trapped in a cycle of effort and failure leading to more effort and failure. **Opportunities to return to religious slavery occur almost every day. When we have fallen short of our expectations, we are tempted to try harder and be more disciplined.** But when we fail in the Christian life, we should apply grace, not renewed effort, as the primary means for becoming right again. (Life Application Bible Commentary – see context in [Galatians](#))

#### Galatians 4:10 You observe days and months and seasons and years.

KJV Galatians 4:10 Ye observe days, and months, and times, and years.

NET Galatians 4:10 You are observing religious days and months and seasons and years.

- **You observe days** Lev 23:1-44; Lev 25:1,13; Nu 28:1-29; Ro 14:5; Col 2:16,17
- Galatians 4 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries
- Galatians 4:1-11 - Don Anderson [Galatians Study 7](#); [More Notes on Galatians Study 7](#);
- [Warren Wiersbe's sermon Born Free - Galatians 4](#) - one of the simplest and most profound expositions you will ever hear on Galatians 4!

### EMPTY RITUALS

**Ritual** describes the the habitual performance of some action and in this context speaks of the prescribed procedure for conducting religious ceremonies.

Paul is aware that his readers had begun to observe these rituals

Paul now explains how they were abandoning liberty for bondage, spiritual power for weakness and spiritual wealth for poverty. One would think this is such a "bad deal" that they would have accepted the "terms." But this is the nature of our fallen flesh and the nature of sin both of which deceive us, to that dark looks light and wrong looks right! These believers were taking up the practices of the "Old Time religion" (so to speak), the religion the Jews had practiced in the Old Testament. And beloved, lest you think the Galatian heresy is dead and gone, I would submit to you that it is alive and well, and seems to be gaining momentum (2019) in what is known as the **Hebrew Roots Movement**. If you are not familiar with this movement, you would be wise to become familiar because I have had several inquiries from readers asking how they can get their dear relatives out of this movement. The best way of course is to cut them off at the beginning for many this is too late and it is very difficult to rescue them. Here are two resources so you can become better educated regarding this subtle, sinister movement...

- [Dangers of the Hebrew Roots Movement](#) - **LOOK OUT!!!**
- [What is the Hebrew Roots movement?](#)
- [Bewitching Believers Through the Hebrew Roots Movement](#)
- [Hebrew Roots Movement - Watchman Fellowship](#)

**Wayne Barber** - Now, as a former Pharisee, Paul identified with these very quickly. Because, remember, the deceiving people that had come amongst them were Judaizers, the Mosaic law, the ceremonial, etc. They had come to put this back on these Galatians, and the Galatians had foolishly bought it...many of those Pharisees had observed every one of those things during their lifetime. And yet they had no life in them whatsoever. It's like a lot of people today. They can come to church. They can give to the church. They can't miss anything for a whole year. Back when I was growing up they had attendance pins and some people would trip over them as they walked through the door. They have never missed a time and they are spiritual, yet they are the meanest people in the whole church. It hadn't done them any good. And that's what he's trying to say. You want to go back to that kind of thing? All these terms most likely fit the Judaizers, terms that they had deceived them with in their false doctrine. These Galatians which Paul calls foolish, or as we could say stupid, had re-enrolled in the kindergarten of the law instead of graduating into the school of grace, learning what grace is and walking in that relationship with Him. We have to be careful when we deal with them however cause every one of us, when we choose our flesh, have just done exactly the same thing. We love to measure what we do. "How many did you have at church last week?" "Well, we had this many." "Well, we had this many." "Oh, you're more spiritual than we are." And we tend to measure ourselves by the way the world measures us. Brother Hession told me one time, he said, "Wayne, we are preaching the same message in England you are preaching over here. We are losing people; you are gaining people. Which one of us is doing it right?" And the point was well taken. When God does something you cannot measure. You don't know exactly what He's doing.

You just let Him do it. But, you see, when we get back up under that mindset that's what kills us. That's what robs us of the intimacy of relationship we can have with Christ. But the utter foolishness of choosing to be a slave, the frustration; it's not going to provide anything for us. There's nothing divine in it with the flesh. But not only that, the foolishness of it, why would you choose to go back to something that offers you nothing? And then finally, the feat of choosing to be a slave. ([Galatians 4 Commentary-Barber](#))

The **NLT** paraphrases it "You are trying to earn favor with God by observing certain days or months or seasons or years."

**William MacDonald** - Paul expresses fear for those who profess to be Christians, yet seek to find favor with God by legal observances. Even unregenerate people can observe days and months and years. It gives some people intense satisfaction to feel there is something they can do in their own strength to win God's smile. But this implies that man has some strength, and hence, to that extent, he does not need the Savior. If Paul could write in this manner to the Galatians, what would he write to professing Christians today who are seeking to attain holiness by legal observances? Would he not condemn the traditions brought into Christianity from Judaism—a humanly ordained priesthood, distinctive vestments for the priest, Sabbath-keeping, holy places, candles, holy water, and so forth? (See context in [Believer's Bible Commentary](#))

**You observe days and months and seasons ([kairos](#)) and years** - Remember Paul was the best of the Pharisees (Php 3:5) so he was very sensitive to meticulous observance of "religious" rituals. The [present tense](#) pictures his readers as continually, carefully observing these Old Testament regulations. The Greek verb for **observe**, *paratereo* (see below), conveys a *strong personal element* in the observing and the [middle voice](#) accentuates their personal involvement in keeping their "spiritual day-timer" so to speak. Paul is referring to the rituals, ceremonies, and festivals of the Jewish religious calendar which God had prescribed for Israel in the Old Testament (Read a summary of these in Lev 23:1-44+ - see also the "Related Resources" below)

**Donald Campbell** - They kept special **days** (weekly sabbaths), and **months** (new moons), and **seasons** (seasonal festivals such as Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles), and **years** (sabbatical and jubilee years). (See context in [The Bible Knowledge Commentary Acts and Epistles](#))

**Uteley** has an interesting thought that "These Galatians were exchanging one religious calendar (pagan) for another (Jewish)." Uteley goes on to point out that "in Romans 14, Paul encouraged strong believers not to judge weaker believers who respected certain days (see Ro 14:5–6+ below). In Galatians it is a matter of the proper understanding of the gospel, in Romans it concerns Christian fellowship (cf. 1 Cor. 8, 10). ([Galatians 4](#))

Romans 14:5-6+ One person regards **one day above another**, another regards every day alike. Each person must be fully convinced in his own mind. 6 He who observes the day, observes it for the Lord, and he who eats, does so for the Lord, for he gives thanks to God; and he who eats not, for the Lord he does not eat, and gives thanks to God.

**NET Note** - In light of the polemic in this letter against the Judaizers (those who tried to force observance of the Mosaic law on Gentile converts to Christianity) this may well be a reference to the observance of Jewish Sabbaths, feasts, and other religious days. ([Galatians 4](#))

**Warren Wiersbe** asks "Does this mean that it is wrong for Christians to set aside one day a year to remember the birth of Christ? Or that a special observance of the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost, or the blessing of the harvest in autumn, is a sin? Not necessarily. **If we observe special days like slaves, hoping to gain some spiritual merit, then we are sinning** But if in the observance, we express our liberty in Christ and let the Spirit enrich us with His grace, then the observance can be a spiritual blessing. The New Testament makes it clear that Christians are not to legislate religious observances for each other (Ro 14:4–13+). We are not to praise the man who celebrates the day, nor are we to condemn the man who does not celebrate. **But if a man thinks he is saving his soul, or automatically growing in grace, because of a religious observance, then he is guilty of legalism.** Our evangelical churches have many different kinds of observances, and it is wrong for us to go beyond the Word of God in comparing, criticizing, or condemning. **But all of us must beware of that legalistic spirit that caters to the flesh, leads to pride, and makes the outward event a substitute for the inward experience.** (See context [The Wiersbe Bible Commentary: New Testament](#) or borrow [Be Free: An Expository Study of Galatians](#))

**A T Robertson** - Paul does not itemize the "days" (Sabbaths, fast-days, feast-days, new moons) nor the "months" (Isa. 66:23) which were particularly observed in the exile nor the "seasons" (passover, pentecost, tabernacles, etc.) nor the "years" (sabbatical years every seventh year and the Year of Jubilee). Paul does not object to these observances for he kept them himself as a Jew. He objected to Gentiles taking to them as a means of salvation. (**Ed:** Of course Paul would clearly object to Jewish believers who would keep these days seeking to curry favor with God or as a means of spiritual growth.) ([Galatians 4 - Robertson's Word Pictures in the New Testament](#))

**J Vernon McGee** - Today I hear legalists claim they are keeping the Mosaic Law, yet they are keeping only the sabbath day. My friend, all the law comes in one package, including the sabbatic year and the Year of Jubilee. James in his epistle said, "For

whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all" (James 2:10). That is, he is guilty of being a lawbreaker. (See context in [Thru the Bible](#))

**C H Spurgeon** - To keep holy days and practise symbolical ceremonies is contrary to the very spirit of Christianity; and those who do so lead us to suspect that they do not know the gospel at all....Among the heathen, there were divers "lucky" and "unlucky" days; sacred days, and days in which they indulged in sensual excess. They had even "holy" months and "unholy" months. Now, all that kind of thing is done away with in the case of a Christian: he is set free from such weak and beggarly superstitions. Among the Jews, there were certain sacred festivals, times that were more notable than other seasons; but they also were done away with in Christ. We observe the Christian Sabbath; but beyond that, to the true believer, there should be no special observance of days, and months, and years. All that is a return to "the weak and beggarly elements" from which Christ has delivered him. That bondage is all ended now; but there are some who still "observe days, and months, and times, and years," and Paul says to them, "I am afraid of you, lest I have bestowed upon you labour in vain." Everyday is holy, every year is holy, to a holy man; and every place is holy, too, to the man who brings a holy heart into it.

**John MacArthur** - Churches were established in a number of cities in Galatia. The churches were flourishing. The people had been forgiven of their transgressions. They had received eternal life. They were possessors of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit had done His transforming work, or begun to do it in their hearts. They were enjoying the fruit of the Spirit. They were enjoying life in the Spirit. They were flourishing as believers, until some Jews came from Jerusalem, and they said they believed also in Jesus. They also believed that Jesus was the Messiah. They trusted in Him as their Savior. However, they said to these Gentiles, "It is not enough for you that you have been saved by faith. That is not valid. **In order to be truly saved, you must keep the law of Moses**" And by that, they were not talking about moral law, **they were talking about ceremonial, civil, social kinds of ordinances, namely circumcision and the festivals and the feasts.** Galatians 4:10: days, and months, and seasons, and years. They were telling these Gentiles, "You need to go back and you need to get your lives in line with all the orders that are in the Mosaic restrictions." **God had given Moses the law for Israel, and it was to identify them as His special people.** And as His special people there were certain ways they had to live and act and eat, and even certain things that were forbidden like going into a Gentile home. There were many prescriptions; you know them from back in the book of Exodus. It wasn't the moral law. **The moral law is simply a reflection of God's character, and that is everlasting and eternal. They're talking about the laws that were prescribing unique life for Israel in the world. So they were saying to these converted Gentiles, "You've got to go back and do all those things that are in the Mosaic law."** The truth of the matter was they did not need to do that, they lacked nothing. When Christ came the law was done, the law was done, its role was over. Now there was neither Jew nor Gentile, but all are one in Christ. So God is not identifying a certain nation or nationality of people by external behaviors and ordinances and events. That was the shadow. That was the ABCs. That was elementary school. Now Christ has come, and we go from shadow to substance. From elementary school we graduate into the school of discipleship with Christ. They lacked nothing. They did not need to go back into the bondage of those old Mosaic prescriptions. Now they said they believed in Christ, which gave them access. They also said that they had come from the Jerusalem church, which would be the mother church, and that they had authority from the apostles, perhaps from James who was the leader of that church. They said, "We represent the truth. We represent the true gospel that you need to hear. You have not received salvation until you follow Mosaic law." ([A Perfect Portrait of Saving Faith](#))

**Observe** (watch closely) (3906) ([paratereo](#) from **para** = beside + **tereo** = watch) means to stand beside and watch carefully, sometimes with evil intent as in Luke 6:7, but often with scrupulous care as here. To observe carefully with great personal interest which *scrupulously* seeks final "success." In classic Greek **paratereo** meant "to carefully observe laws or commandments." In this case **paratereo** refers to the readers doing so "religiously" or [scrupulously](#), the idea being in a way that is characterized by careful observation of what is thought to be morally right. This scrupulous observation is one of the hallmarks of legalism -- "I need to observe \_\_\_\_\_, in order to merit favor or curry favor with God. If I miss the day or month, then I will receive "[demerits](#)" from God." It is man's works based salvation (sanctification), and is not based on God's grace (free, unmerited favor).

Paul addressed a similar problem in the church at Colossae warning the saints explaining that **days**, etc" that had been prescribed in the Old Testament were like "divine fingers" pointing to the Messiah, the goal in fact to which the entire OT had always pointed...

Therefore no one is to act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to **a festival** or a **new moon** ([What was the significance of the new moon?](#)) or a **Sabbath day**—things which are a mere shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ. (Col 2:16,17+)

If (FIRST CLASS CONDITIONAL = ASSUMED FULFILLED AND CAN BE TRANSLATED "SINCE") you have died with Christ (PAST TENSE - YOU WERE "CO-CRUCIFIED" WITH CHRIST) to **the elementary principles** ([stoicheion](#)) of the world, why, as if you were living in the world, do you submit yourself to decrees, such as, 21 "Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch!" 22 (which all refer to things destined to perish with use)—in accordance with the commandments and teachings of men? 23 These are matters which have, to be sure, the appearance of wisdom in self-made religion and self-abasement and severe treatment of the body, but are of

no value against fleshly indulgence. (Col 2:20-23+)

#### Related Resources:

- [What is the Day of Atonement \(Yom Kippur\) in Leviticus 23:27-28?](#)
- [What are the different Jewish festivals in the Bible?](#) - There are seven Jewish festivals or feasts outlined in the Bible. While they are mentioned throughout Scripture, we find instructions for all seven laid out in Leviticus 23. Leviticus 23:2+ refers to the seven Jewish festivals, literally "appointed times," also called "holy convocations." These were days appointed and ordained by God to be kept to the honor of His name. These times of celebration are important not only to Israel, but also to the overall message of the Bible, because each one foreshadows or symbolizes an aspect of the life, death, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. ([Read more...](#))
- [What is the difference between the ceremonial law, the moral law, and the judicial law in the Old Testament?](#)
- [Law vs. grace-why is there so much conflict among Christians on the issue?](#)
- [What does it mean that Christians are not under the law?](#)
- [What should Christians learn from the Mosaic Law?](#)

#### Galatians 4:11 I fear for you, that perhaps I have labored over you in vain.

KJV Galatians 4:11 I am afraid of you, lest I have bestowed upon you labour in vain.

NKJV Galatians 4:11 "I am afraid for you, lest I have labored for you in vain"

NRSV Galatians 4:11 "I am afraid that my work for you may have been wasted"

TEV Galatians 4:11 "I am afraid for you! Can it be that all my work for you has been for nothing"

JB Galatians 4:11 "You make me feel I have wasted my time with you"

- **I fear for you** Gal 4:20; 2 Cor 11:2,3; 12:20,21
- **that perhaps I have labored over you in vain** Gal 2:2; 5:2-4; Isa 49:4; Acts 16:6; 1 Cor 15:58; Phil 2:16; 1 Th 3:5; 2 Jn 1:8
- Galatians 4 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries
- Galatians 4:1-11 - Don Anderson [Galatians Study 7](#); [More Notes on Galatians Study 7](#)
- [Warren Wiersbe's sermon Born Free - Galatians 4](#) - one of the simplest and most profound expositions you will ever hear on Galatians 4!

### PAUL SHUDDERS AT THE THOUGHT!

**Fear** in English is an unpleasant often strong emotion caused by anticipation or awareness of danger, and in this case the danger was spiritual.

**I fear for you, that perhaps I have labored over you in vain** - Paul had brought the Gospel of grace to these people and taught them that freedom was living by the same grace that saved them. And the Spirit that wrought regeneration in their hearts is the same Spirit Who empowers daily living under grace not law. And so he is grieving over these saints.

**MacArthur** writes "How sad for such a faithful servant of the Lord to believe that all the life-threatening, sacrificial service he had given in behalf of the people of Galatia was worthless. All the travel, illness, loneliness, struggles, even the stoning he received in Lystra that left him for dead, was for nothing if they reverted to their old slavery. No wonder this is such an impassioned epistle. The thought of all that effort being void compelled Paul to write as he did." (See [Galatians MacArthur New Testament Commentary](#)).

**Robertson** - It hurt him to the quick after his own merciful deliverance to see these Gentile Christians drawn into this spider-web of Judaizing Christians, once set free, now enslaved again. ([Galatians 4 - Robertson's Word Pictures in the New Testament](#))

In Galatians 3:4+ he had made a similar statement asking "Did you suffer so many things in **vain** (**eike**)—if indeed it was in vain?" What he was saying there as Wayne Barber explains is "Maybe you didn't come to know Christ to begin with. Maybe everything I taught you just went right over your head, in one ear right out the other ear. It never lodged; you never received that truth. You never were changed by that truth." ([Galatians 4 Commentary-Barber](#))

**McGee** - Paul is saying, in a nice way, that he thinks he has wasted his time among them. Since they have been saved by grace, their returning to the Law is the same as returning to their former idolatry. He reminded them that they had not known God by means



of the Mosaic Law but by faith in Jesus Christ. (See context in [Thru the Bible](#))

**I fear** ([present tense](#))(5399)([phobeo](#)) means to be in an apprehensive state that can range from mild uneasiness to stark terror. Where Paul was on this continuum is hard to say, but clearly he was very "[uneasy!](#)" Paul fears that the worst has happened.

Paul's point is that he now knows the Galatians were observing "religious times" and his fear is that his labor would be for nothing, which would be the case if they continued in their attachment to the legalistic practices.

**I have labored** (2872)([kopiao](#) from [kopos](#) = labor, fatigue) means to to exhibit great effort and exertion, to the point of sweat and exhaustion (until worn out, depleted), even with the implication of difficulty and trouble. Paul used [kopiao](#) in describing his discipleship efforts among the Colossians "For this purpose (THAT THEY BE COMPLETE IN CHRIST - Col 1:28+) also I **labor** ([kopiao](#) - [present tense](#) continually), striving according to His power, which mightily works within me." (Col 1:29+). Undoubtedly Paul had worked just as hard among the Galatians, and now instead of being "complete in Christ" he fears they may be going in the opposite direction spiritually!

**Vain** (without cause) (1500)([eike](#)) refers to being without success or effect, to no avail, to no purpose or in vain (having no real value or failing to achieve a desired result). As noted above Paul used this same word in Galatians 3:4.

## DON ANDERSON'S LESSONS from Galatians 4:1-11

1. LESSON #1: We become sons and daughters at salvation.
2. LESSON #2: As sons and daughters, we are part of God's family.
3. LESSON #3: God sent forth His Son and the Spirit to guide us into all truth.
4. LESSON #4: The inheritance is for the family.
5. LESSON #5: God's timing is always perfect. "He has made everything beautiful in its time . . ." (Ecc. 3:11 NIV).
6. LESSON #6: The cry of relationship is "Abba! Father!"
7. LESSON #7: The Holy Spirit restrains us from evil.
8. LESSON #8: We come from a slave to a son by the Savior through the Spirit.
9. LESSON #9: The two-fold purpose of the Son's coming into the world is: (1) "in order that he might deliver out by the payment of a ransom those under law" and (2) "in order that we might receive the adoption" (verse 5).
10. LESSON #10: How careful we must be to focus and concentrate upon an ever deepening relationship with Jesus Christ rather than performing for Him.
11. LESSON #11: May God's Spirit motivate us to press on in perseverance to the finish line.

**Galatians 4:12 I beg of you, brethren, **become** as I [am], for I also [have become] as you [are]. You have done me no wrong;**

KJV Galatians 4:12 Brethren, I beseech you, be as I am; for I am as ye are: ye have not injured me at all.

- **I beg of you, brethren, become as I am** Gal 2:14; 6:14; Ge 34:15; 1 Ki 22:4; Acts 21:21; 1 Cor 9:20-23; Phil 3:7,8
- **You have done me no wrong** 2 Cor 2:5
- Galatians 4 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries
- Galatians 4:12-20 - Don Anderson [Galatians Study 8](#); [More Notes on Galatians Study 8](#)
- [Warren Wiersbe's sermon Born Free - Galatians 4](#) - one of the simplest and most profound expositions you will ever hear on Galatians 4!

Paul continues his appeal to his readers to drop their legalism

The appeal from his relations to them (Galatians 4:12-20)

- i. The appeal for them to adopt his position (Galatians 4:12a)
- ii. The reminder of his past relations to them (Galatians 4:12b-14)
- iii. The change in their relation to him (Galatians 4:15-18)
- iv. The travail he is undergoing for them (Galatians 4:19-20)

**PAUL MAKES A MORE**

## PERSONAL APPEAL

Paul's appeal in Galatians 4:12-20 are some of the strongest expressions of deep tenderness and personal affection in any of his letters.

**John Stott** writes " In Galatians 1–3 we have been listening to Paul the apostle, Paul the theologian, Paul the defender of the faith; but now we are hearing Paul the man, Paul the pastor, Paul the passionate lover of souls." (The Message of Galatians)

**I beg of you, brethren, become as I am** - **Become** is [present imperative](#) and so Paul is issuing a command to "Keep on becoming as I am." "**Become as I am**" is first in the Greek sentence for emphasis. And notice he now calls them **brethren** which is a touch of compassion. He will end this personal appeal with the endearing phrase "**my children** ([teknon](#))" (Gal 4:19).

What does Paul mean by **become as I am**? The best answer was given by Paul himself earlier in this letter when he wrote

For through the Law I died to the Law, so that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me. (Galatians 2:19-20+)

"Become like me—  
delivered from the law  
and no longer living under it."

They are in danger of being dragged under the Law by the Judaizers and he reminds them that he had died to the Law and that this should be their confession and acknowledgement.

**Paul** made a similar statement to **King Agrippa**

Agrippa replied to Paul, "In a short time you will persuade me to become a Christian." And Paul said, "I would wish to God, that whether in a short or long time, not only you, but also all who hear me this day, **might become such as I am**, except for these chains." (Acts 26:28-29+)

NLT Galatians 4:12 Dear brothers and sisters, I plead with you to live as I do in freedom from these things, for I have become like you Gentiles-- free from those laws. You did not mistreat me when I first preached to you. (Gal 4:12NLT)

**Donald Campbell** - Become like me, for I became like you, that is, "Become free from the Law as I am, for after my conversion I became like the Gentiles, no longer living under the Law." The irony, however, was that the Galatian Gentiles were putting themselves under the Law after their conversions.

**John Stott** - All Christians should be able to say something like this, especially to unbelievers, namely that we are so satisfied with Jesus Christ, with His freedom, joy and salvation, that we want other people to become like us. (Ibid)

**John Witmer** on **become as I am** - In the broader sense, Paul presented himself as a model of Christian faith and life, something he does elsewhere as well (1 Cor. 4:16; 11:1), because he introduced them to the Christian faith (v. 13). Paul's life motto was "For to me to live is Christ" (Phil. 1:21), which should be the life objective of every Christian. (Twenty-First Century Biblical Commentary Series – The Books of Galatians & Ephesians: By Grace through Faith)

**Beg** (beseech, request - [present tense](#) continually) ([1189](#))([deomai](#) from **deo** = to bind) indicates Paul was asking for the sake of their spiritual welfare and wholeness, asking even with a sense of a sense of urgency. He is pleading with them to reconsider their way.

**Brethren** ([80](#))([adelphos](#) from **a** = denotes unity + **delphus** = a womb) means brother or near kinsman and in this context describes members of the Christian community. Paul here appeals to them as his Christian brothers and sisters in Christ as he seeks to urge them to walk in the same freedom that he had in Christ relying on God's grace and God's Spirit.

**For I also have become as you are** - Note the italicized words which are added by the translators. Literally it reads "for I also as you." The only verb in this sentence is "become" discussed above. NLT paraphrases it "I have become like you Gentiles-- free from those laws."

**MacArthur** explains it this way - When he came to Christ he had torn away every shred of legalism, in which he had been enmeshed more tightly than perhaps few other Jews of his day (see Phil. 3:4–6). Although he now willingly became like a Jew when among Jews and like a Gentile when among Gentiles, becoming "all things to all men, that [he might] by all means save some" (1 Cor. 9:20–22), Paul never represented himself nor thought of himself as anything but a sinner redeemed by Jesus Christ, in whom "there is neither Jew nor Greek, ... slave nor free man, ... male nor female" (Gal. 3:28). Upon the advice of the elders in the

Jerusalem church, Paul agreed on one occasion to sponsor four men in taking a certain Jewish vow in the Temple, in order to keep from needlessly offending unbelieving Jews (Acts 21:23–26). But he did so as an act of his liberty as a Christian, not under the compulsion of the law. (See context in [Galatians MacArthur New Testament Commentary](#))

**James Montgomery Boice** explains that Paul "became like them, in order to win them to Christ.... This is a principle of great importance for all who are trying to win other people for Christ. Our goal must be to make them like us, while the means to that end is to make ourselves like them. Witnessing involves doctrine, but it also involves the most personal involvement of the witness with those to whom he or she is witnessing." ([The Expositor's Bible Commentary](#))

**Stott** explains that "The reference is probably to his visits to them. When Paul came to them in Galatia, he did not keep his distance or stand on his dignity, but became like them. He put himself in their place and identified himself with them. Although he was a Jew, he became like the Gentiles they were. This was in accordance with his principle stated in 1 Corinthians 9:20–22." (See [The Message of Galatians](#))

**THOUGHT** - "Embedded here is a principle of far-reaching importance for ministers, missionaries and other Christian workers. It is that, in seeking to win other people for Christ, our end is to make them like us, while the means to that end is to make ourselves like them. If they are to become one with us in Christian conviction and experience, we must first become one with them in Christian compassion. We must be able to say with the apostle Paul: 'I became like you; now you become like me.'" (Stott)

**African Bible Commentary** - The reason Paul gives for asking them to become like him is that I became like you (4:12b). He had become like the Jews who had been freed from the demands of the law, and like the Gentiles in that he no longer prized his Jewish heritage as making him superior to them.

**You have done me no wrong** - This is explained in the following passages where he reminds them of their exemplary behavior toward him. **MacArthur** adds that "They not only had done him no wrong but had openly and lovingly received him while he was in extremely adverse personal circumstances. "How then," he was wondering, "could you reject me now, after being so accepting of me then?"

**Kistemaker**- When he now says, "No wrong did you do me," he is reflecting on the manner in which he had been received by the Galatians when he had met them for the first time and worked among them, as is clear from verses 13-15. (Baker New Testament Commentary – Exposition of Galatians)

**Done wrong** (91)([adikeo](#) from [adikos](#) = unjust) means to act unjustly.

**Spurgeon** - "Be perfectly at home with me, for I am so with you. Though you Galatians have treated me very badly, yet ye have not really injured me, and I freely overlook your ill manners toward me."

**Galatians 4:13 but you know that it was because of a bodily illness that I preached the gospel to you the first time;**

KJV Galatians 4:13 Ye know how through infirmity of the flesh I preached the gospel unto you at the first.

NLT Galatians 4:13 Surely you remember that I was sick when I first brought you the Good News.

CSB Galatians 4:13 you know that previously I preached the gospel to you because of a physical illness.

NIV Galatians 4:13 As you know, it was because of an illness that I first preached the gospel to you.

- **but you know that it was because of a bodily illness** 1 Corinthians 2:3; 2 Corinthians 10:10; 11:6,30; 12:7-10; 13:4
- **the first time** Galatians 1:6; Acts 16:6
- Galatians 4 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries
- Galatians 4:12-20 - Don Anderson [Galatians Study 8; More Notes on Galatians Study 8](#)
- [Warren Wiersbe's sermon Born Free - Galatians 4](#) - one of the simplest and most profound expositions you will ever hear on Galatians 4!

In this section of personal appeal, Paul writes first of their attitude toward him (Gal 4:13-16) and then of his attitude toward them (Gal 4:17-20).

**But you know that it was because of a bodily illness**- The phrase **but you know** indicates that the readers understood to what **illness** Paul was referring. The interpretation of this statement is very difficult and one best avoid being dogmatic. We can only do some "educated" speculation so the following is to be read with that understanding. Some say it refers to Paul's "thorn in the flesh"



(2 Cor 12:7) that was given to keep him humble. A few think this refers to the opposition Paul experienced (e.g., Acts 13:45, 50+; Acts 14:19+, cf his allusion to scars in Gal 6:17+). Most interpreters think that Paul is referring to a serious physical affliction he had at this time.

**Douglas Moo** on "thorn in the flesh" - Witherington (1998: 309) argues that they are not the same because the "thorn in the flesh" was given to Paul "fourteen years" before he wrote 2 Corinthians (see 2 Cor. 12:2), that is, around AD 42–43, whereas Paul first visited the Galatians at the earliest in AD 46–47. But in 2 Cor. 12:7 the present tenses of the verbs *περπαίρωμαι* (*hyperairōmai*, becoming conceited) and *κολαφίζω* (*kolaphizē*, torment) imply that the thorn was a persistent condition (e.g., Harris 2005: 857)....**Why Paul's physical problem led him to evangelize in Galatia simply cannot be known.** ([Galatians Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament](#))

**Thomas Schreiner** - The welcome Paul received among the Galatians was remarkable because his presence among them was not attractive. He apparently suffered from sickness when he proclaimed the gospel to them. Hays suggests that Paul needed "to recuperate from being flogged, beaten, or stoned," and a number of interpreters now argue that his physical problem was due to his suffering as an apostle. But the phrase "because of weakness of the flesh" is more naturally understood as referring to sickness rather than persecution. Therefore, most scholars think that Paul refers to a bodily ailment or sickness rather than his being persecuted. ([Galatians](#) - ZECNT)

**William MacDonald** - God often uses weak, despised, poor instruments to accomplish His work in order that the glory will be His and not man's. (See context in [Believer's Bible Commentary](#))

**Schreiner** adds "Paul regularly teaches that his sufferings were the means God used for the dissemination of the gospel (e.g., 2 Cor 1:3–11; 2:14–15; 4:7–12; 11:23–29; 13:4; Col 1:24–29). God's regular pattern is to display his strength in and through the weakness of his servants. Therefore, Paul's sickness and suffering are not astonishing or surprising to him but precisely what he expects (Acts 9:16)." (See context in [Galatians](#))

**Bodily** (4561) ([sarx](#)) in this context speaks of his flesh, his literal body.

**Weakness** (sickness) (769) ([astheneia](#) from **a** = without + **sthénos** = strength, bodily vigor) means literally without strength or bodily vigor = want of strength = lacking strength. **Richards** writes "This group of words expresses powerlessness. The weak are without strength, incapacitated in some serious way." (Expository Dictionary)

**That I preached the gospel to you the first time** - As alluded to above, it is difficult to interpret as to when this proclamation refers. We know that at the beginning of the third missionary journey in Acts 18:23+ it is clearly implied the Galatians had received the Gospel, for Luke records "And having spent some time there (ANTIOCH - Acts 18:22), he left and passed successively through the Galatian region and Phrygia, strengthening all the **disciples** (INDICATING THEY HAD RECEIVED THE GOSPEL)."

**Preached the gospel** (2097) ([euaggelizo/euangelizo](#) from **eu** = good, well + **aggéllō** = proclaim, tell; English = evangelize) means to announce good news concerning something. **Euaggelizo/euangelizo** in its original sense could be used to refer to a declaration of any kind of good news, but in the NT it (with 2 exceptions Lk 1:19; 1 Th 3:6) refers especially to the glad tidings of the coming kingdom of God and of salvation obtained through Jesus Christ's death, burial and resurrection. Most of NT uses of **euaggelizo** are translated "preach" or "preach the gospel," whichever fits more smoothly into the context.

**The first time** (4387) ([proteros](#) from **pró** = forth, before) means prior (earlier in time or order), previous (going before in time, implying existing or occurring earlier), of an earlier time, all pertaining to a point of time earlier in a sequence.

**Galatians 4:14 and that which was a trial to you in my bodily condition you did not despise or loathe, but you received me as an angel of God, as Christ Jesus Himself.**

KJV Galatians 4:14 And my temptation which was in my flesh ye despised not, nor rejected; but received me as an angel of God, even as Christ Jesus.

TEV "But you did not despise or reject me, even though my physical condition was a great trial to you"

JB "you never showed the least sign of being revolted or disgusted by my disease that was such a trial to you"

- **that which was a trial to you in my bodily condition** Galatians 4:13; Job 12:5; Ps 119:141; Ecclesiastes 9:16; Isaiah 53:2,3; 1 Corinthians 1:28; 4:10; 1 Thessalonians 4:8
- **an angel of God** 2 Samuel 14:17; 19:27; Zech 12:8; Mal 2:7; Heb 13:2

- **as Christ Jesus Himself** Mt 10:40; 18:5; 25:40; Luke 10:16; Jn 13:20; 2 Cor 5:20; 1 Th 2:13
- Galatians 4 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries
- Galatians 4:12-20 - Don Anderson [Galatians Study 8; More Notes on Galatians Study 8](#)
- [Warren Wiersbe's sermon Born Free - Galatians 4](#) - one of the simplest and most profound expositions you will ever hear on Galatians 4!

**And that which was a trial to you in my bodily condition you did not despise or loathe** - Many Jews and Gentiles would have seen Paul's illness as a judgment from God. The fact is that Paul was in God's will. Nevertheless, the illness referred to in Gal 4:13 was a **trial** to the Galatians. How so? Commentators say that because whatever the illness was, it created a response of revulsion. And yet despite this, the Galatian believers did not **despise or loathe** his "repulsive" affliction! Won't it be interesting to speak with Paul about this in Heaven!

**THOUGHT** - It is a wonderful thing when people accept God's servants, not because of their outward appearance, but because they represent the Lord and bring His message (Wiersbe)

One writer has an interesting thought (but it cannot be substantiated from the text) suggesting that the Judaizers may have argued that Paul's suffering shows that he was under the law's curse.

**Hendricksen on trial** - Two ideas are here combined: *a.* "You did not despise or loathe me because of my physical condition"; *b.* "You did not yield to the temptation to do so." (Baker New Testament Commentary)

**Schreiner** comments that "Such weakness was a temptation to the Galatians, for it seemed to be a sign that Paul's message was not from God, for surely a divine message would be accompanied by the strength rather than the weakness of the messenger." (Ibid)

**J Vernon McGee** has a "salty" comment (as usual) - Probably Paul's thorn in the flesh was some sort of eye trouble, and it evidently made him very unattractive. I cannot conceive of them wanting to pluck out their eyes and give them to Paul if what he really needed was another leg. Apparently Paul had an eye disease which is common in that land and is characterized by excessive pus that runs out of the eyes. You can well understand how unattractive that would be to look at while he was ministering to them. Paul says, "You just ignored it, and received me so wonderfully when I preached the gospel to you." (See [Thru the Bible](#))

**THOUGHT** - See [pix of trachoma](#) [see [Mayo clinic description](#)] which is a communicable eye illness which would have made others even more likely to reject one with obvious symptoms/signs - as a former infectious disease specialist I tend to favor **trachoma** as Paul's revolting illness as it is very common in the middle east. And is it not fascinating that in the context Paul mentions **they would have plucked out your eyes and given them to me?**

**Trial** (Temptation) ([3986](#))([peirasmos](#) from [peirazo](#) = to make trial of, try, tempt, prove in either a good or bad sense - classic Greek of a medical test to prove health or disease) describes first the idea of putting to the test and then refers to the tests or pressures that come in order to discover a person's nature or the quality of some thing.

**Despise** (regard, treat or view with contempt) ([1848](#))([exoutheneo](#) from **ek** = an intensifies + **outheneo** = bring to naught) is a strong verb which means to despise someone or something on basis that it is worthless or of no value, considered as nothing. To treat someone contemptuously as if completely worthless or despicable.

**Loathe** (only use in NT)([1609](#))([ekptuo](#) from **ek** = out + **ptuo** = to spit) means literally to spit out used anciently as a gesture to ward off illness or demonic threat (see Schlier below). BDAG = "to eject saliva as an expression of contempt." Spit in token of disgust. The figurative idea is to reject with a measure of disdain. The point is that they did **not** do this to Paul when he preached the Gospel to them! And recall that Paul had some type of illness which makes this an interesting verb to use in the context. One might say the Galatians believers did not spit out at him as did superstitious pagans!

**Schlier** - The Galatians did not see in Paul a person demon-possessed because of his sickness, and so they did not spit at him in the ancient gesture of self-defense against demons or misfortune. There are many examples of spitting both in incantations and for the healing of sickness, and spittle came into use in Christian baptism in connection with exorcism. The Galatians, however, received Paul as an angel of God. (See context in [Theological Dictionary of the New Testament: Abridged](#))

**Robertson on ekptuo** - Here only in N. T. Clemen (Primitive Christianity, p. 342) thinks it should be taken literally here since people spat out as a prophylactic custom at the sight of invalids especially epileptics. But Plutarch uses it of mere rejection. ([Galatians 4 - Robertson's Word Pictures in the New Testament](#))

**Utley on loathe** - The use of the second verb is the reason that some relate Paul's illness to the superstition in the ancient Near East about "the evil eye" (cf. Gal 3:1+). The magical remedy was "to spit" and thereby protect yourself from its spell, possibly referring to: (1) an unusual-looking eye; or (2) a wild-eyed look (epilepsy). ([Galatians 4](#))

**But you received me as an angel of God, as Christ Jesus Himself** - As the verb for **received** implies they basically "[put out the welcome mat](#)" for the apostle Paul and accepted not only him but his message of salvation by grace through faith. In fact after only his second message in Pisidian Antioch, the Gentiles there "began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord" (Acts 13:48+).

**MacArthur** - During the first trip to Galatia, persecution had been severe, and Paul had even been stoned and left for dead by those hostile to the gospel (Acts 14:19). But as he later returned to Antioch with Barnabas, one can imagine how he must have marveled over the vastly contrasting love and kindness he had received from believers. (See context in [Galatians MacArthur New Testament Commentary](#))

**Received** (1209)([dechomai](#) = [middle voice](#) of a primary verb) means to to receive something offered or transmitted by another (Luke 2:28). To take something into one's hand and so to grasp (Luke 2:28, 22:17). To be receptive to someone (Mt 10:14, 40). To take a favorable attitude toward something (Mt 11:14).

**Angel** (32)([aggelos/angelos](#)) literally means a messenger (one who bears a message - Lk 1:11, 2:9, etc or does an errand). Most of the NT uses refer to heavenly angels (messengers) who are supernatural, transcendent beings with power to carry out various tasks. So Paul said they accepted him as they would an angelic messenger from God, the implication being that they would have a high estimate of a divine angel.

**As Christ Jesus Himself** - When Paul spoke it was as if the Lord Himself were speaking. Paul spoke the words, but the Galatians accepted them as the very Words of God. Writing to the Thessalonian believers Paul said "For this reason we also constantly thank God that when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but for what it really is, **the word of God**, which also performs its work in you who believe." (1 Th 2:13+)

As Paul wrote to the saints at Corinth "Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, **as though God were making an appeal through us**; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God." (2 Cor 5:20+).

Jesus Himself had prophesied that His messengers would be received as if He Himself had come "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who receives whomever I send receives Me; and he who receives Me receives Him who sent Me." (John 13:20, cf Mt 10:40, Lk 10:16+).

**THOUGHT** - Is this maxim not still in effect today? If we go with His message, then the reception or rejection of His Gospel is tantamount to acceptance or rejection of Jesus Christ. So do not be surprised, frustrated or put off when you act as His messenger and His Word is rejected!

**Galatians 4:15 Where then is that sense of blessing you had? For I bear you witness that, if possible, you would have plucked out your eyes and given them to me.**

**KJV Galatians 4:15** Where is then the blessedness ye spake of? for I bear you record, that, if it had been possible, ye would have plucked out your own eyes, and have given them to me.

**Hendriksen** - Where, then, (is) your (former) blessedness. For I testify to you that, had it been possible, your very eyes y o u would have plucked out and given to me.

- **Where then is that sense of blessing you had** Galatians 3:14; 5:22; 6:4; Luke 8:13; Ro 4:6-9; 5:2; 15:13
- **For I bear you witness** Ro 10:2; 2 Cor 8:3; Col 4:13
- **if possible, you would have plucked out your eyes** Gal 4:19; Ro 9:3; 1 Th 2:8; 5:13; 1 Jn 3:16-18
- Galatians 4 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries
- Galatians 4:12-20 - Don Anderson [Galatians Study 8; More Notes on Galatians Study 8](#)
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## **HAVE YOU LOST THAT LOVING FEELING?**

There was a song in the 1960's by the Righteous Brothers entitled "[You've Lost that Loving Feeling](#)." (it's a pretty innocent song if you want to give listen to the song that was a number 1 hit the year I graduated from High School!) Paul is implying that these believers in Galatia who had received the loving message of salvation from Paul had "lost that loving feeling" for the messenger!

**Where then is that sense of blessing you had?** - Although it is phrased as a question, Paul reminds them of the **sense of**

**blessing** they had in regard to his presence the first time. Paul's point is that the Galatians rejoiced when Paul arrived among them as like an angel of God with a message of such good news. The question implies that when Paul was asking the question the Galatians no longer felt the same way as they did when Paul was with them.

This question is rhetorical for as **Wiersbe** says "Paul knew what had happened: the Judaizers had come in and stolen their hearts!" (Borrow [Be Free: An Expository Study of Galatians](#))

**THOUGHT** - The message is that we **ALL** need to be very careful in listening to false teachers. I remember a young Hispanic husband and wife who were radically committed to sharing the Gospel when we traveled into Mexico on an evangelistic tour. I will never forget when Miguel even got out of the vehicle to witness to the Mexican border guard! We thought we would all be restricted from entering Mexico! And so we all could see "great things" in store for Miguel when we returned to America. But it was not to be because the couple came back and somehow were enticed into a cult in Central Texas. I remember pleading with them in my home, almost to the point of tears, begging them to come out of the cult (they were living on a commune by then - it was not David Koresh if you are wondering). I will never forget that the husband seemed to waver momentarily, but the wife was absolutely steadfast and adamant, refusing to budge an inch. Not long after that they totally cut off all communication (they had "lost that loving feeling" -- I had been a benefactor to them in a time of great need) and I never heard from them again. That was over 30 years ago. So I can sympathize with the deep grief that Paul was feeling over the Galatians. It is very painful and even after over 30 years it still hurts me deeply to think of Miquel and Sylvia and little Miguelito! I pray they all came out of the cult and were genuinely saved but only God knows! Heaven is going to be a most interesting place for many reasons!

**MacArthur** agrees writing "Paul was saying. "What made you lose that satisfaction? Why have you turned against me and against the gospel of grace?" (See [Galatians MacArthur New Testament Commentary](#))

**Matthew Henry** - As if he had said, "Time was when you expressed the greatest joy and satisfaction in the glad tidings of the gospel, and were very forward in pouring out your blessings upon me as the publisher of them; whence is it that you are now so much altered, that you have so little relish of them or respect for me? You once thought yourselves happy in receiving the gospel; have you now any reason to think otherwise?"

**THOUGHT** - Those who have left their first love would do well to consider (cf Rev 2:4-5) Where is now the blessedness they once spoke of? What has become of that pleasure they used to take in communion with God, and in the company of his servants? (M. Henry)

**Blessing** (3108) (**makarismos** from **makarizo** = to bless from **makarios**) means blessedness or extolling as blessed. In Gal 4:15 the idea is a frame of mind produced by favorable circumstances and implies a feeling of joy, fulfillment, and contentedness.

**For** - Paul explains the Galatians' former sense of blessing.

**I bear you witness that, if possible, you would have plucked out your eyes and given them to me** - As discussed above (see [Thought](#)) what Paul says here would certainly at least imply that he had something wrong with his vision. Perhaps he needed spectacles (or bifocals like yours truly), but this comment raises the very real possibility that he had contracted a disease such as trachoma, the leading preventable cause of blindness worldwide. The fact is that **trachoma** was (1) common (endemic) in the Middle East, (2) is communicated to others (which would be a cause for "revulsion" for fear of contracting this dread disease which could end in scarring of the cornea and marked loss of vision), (3) Chlamydia eye infection (caused by Intracellular Bacterium = [Chlamydia trachomatis](#)) untreated tends to be chronic (cf Paul's time phrase in 2 Cor 12:2 with the "thorn in his flesh" - 2 Cor 12:7) Obviously, this is conjecture but based on my background as an infectious disease expert and lecturing and writing on trachoma it is least a consideration. It will be interesting to ask Paul in Heaven!

**Plucked out your eyes** - This would be a figurative way of describing what the Galatians were willing to sacrifice for their beloved Paul, in other words being willing to make a "priceless" sacrifice (which giving up one's eyes would certainly be). And since in ancient times the eyes were considered to be the most precious of the body's parts, to pluck them out for another would be a graphic way of depicting one's willingness to go to the extreme for another's welfare.

**MacArthur** comments "Paul may simply have been using a common figure of speech, suggesting that the Galatians would have given up their very eyesight, the most precious and irreplaceable of the physical senses, if doing that could have helped him. If, as some interpreters speculate, Paul's bodily affliction was a form of eye disease, he may here have been referring to the Galatians' willingness to have literally exchanged their eyes for his, had such a transplant been possible in those days. Eye disease was common in ancient times, as it still is in most underdeveloped countries today. If Paul had an eye affliction it could have been a condition of long standing, perhaps the "thorn in the flesh" that was "a messenger of Satan" the Lord allowed him to endure as a humbling reminder of His sufficient grace (2 Cor. 12:7-9). Because malaria sometimes attacks the optic nerve, causing loss of color

recognition, atrophy, and even blindness, his affliction while in Galatia may have affected the way he saw as well as the way he looked. The possibility of poor eyesight is substantiated by the closing section of the Galatian epistle itself, which begins: "See with what large letters I am writing to you with my own hand" (6:11). Paul usually dictated his letters to an amanuensis, a type of stenographer (see Rom. 16:22), but often added a postscript or personal greeting in his own hand (1 Cor. 16:21; Col. 4:18; 2 Thess. 3:17). If he had limited vision, he would likely have used larger than normal letters in order to see what he was writing. Whatever the specific nature of Paul's illness, his primary point here is clear: the Galatians had loved him with a love that would have compelled them to make any sacrifice on his behalf. (See context in [Galatians MacArthur New Testament Commentary](#))

**I bear...witness** ([present tense](#) - continually)(3140)([martureo](#) from [mártus](#) = witness = one who has information or knowledge of something and can bring to light or confirm something. English = *martyr*) in its most basic sense refers to a legal witness. Thus the verb **martureo** means to be a witness, to testify, to give evidence, to give testimony, to bear record, to affirm that one has seen or heard or experienced something.

**If possible** - The "if" expresses a second class condition which is contrary to fact. The word **possible** ([dunatos](#)) means one who possesses power and in context speaks of possibility. These Galatian believers esteemed Paul so highly they would have given their eyes to him if they could have done so, but they could not. So Paul is only speaking hypothetically.

**Spurgeon** - The apostle remembers how they received him at first, his gospel was to them like life from the dead; and though he was full of infirmities,—perhaps had weak eyes,—perhaps had a stammering tongue,—perhaps was at that time very much depressed in spirit,—yet, he says, "You received me as an angel of God, even as Christ Jesus. You loved me so much that, if it had been possible, you would have plucked out your own eyes, and have given them to me."

#### Galatians 4:16 So have I become your enemy by telling you the truth?

KJV Galatians 4:16 Am I therefore become your enemy, because I tell you the truth?

- **become** Galatians 3:1-4; 1 Kings 18:17,18; 21:20; 22:8,27; 2 Chronicles 24:20-22; 25:16; Psalms 141:5; Proverbs 9:8; John 7:7; 8:45
- **by telling you the truth** Galatians 2:5,14; 5:7
- Galatians 4 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries
- Galatians 4:12-20 - Don Anderson [Galatians Study 8; More Notes on Galatians Study 8](#)
- [Warren Wiersbe's sermon Born Free - Galatians 4](#) - one of the simplest and most profound expositions you will ever hear on Galatians 4!

**So** (hoste) therefore, 'for this reason, so, so then, so now, now. **Matthew Henry** -The more to impress upon them a just shame of their present conduct, he again asks, "Am I become your enemy, because I tell you the truth? How is it that I, who was heretofore your favourite, am now accounted your enemy? Can you pretend any other reason for it than that I have told you the truth, endeavoured to acquaint you with, and to confirm you in, the truth of the gospel? And, if not, how unreasonable must your disaffection be!"

**THOUGHT** - It is no uncommon thing for men to account those their enemies who are really their best friends; for so, undoubtedly, those are, whether ministers or others, who tell them the truth, and deal freely and faithfully with them in matters relating to their eternal salvation, as the apostle now did with these Christians. Ministers may sometimes create enemies to themselves by the faithful discharge of their duty; for this was the case of Paul, he was accounted their enemy for telling them the truth. Yet ministers must not forbear speaking the truth, for fear of offending others and drawing their displeasure upon them. They may be easy in their own minds, when they are conscious to themselves that, if others have become their enemies, **it is only for telling them the truth.** (M. Henry) Henry's comment begs the question "Have you made any enemies recently?" "Have they spurned you or ignored you now that you have told them the truth of the Gospel in love?" Take heart, because you do not know what the sovereign God might do with the "Gospel seed" you have sown!

**Have I become your enemy by telling you the truth?**- Paul contrasts the behavior of the Galatian believers toward him in the past (see Gal 4:13-15) with their new attitude toward him as he writes. Paul asks this question as a means of trying to wake up the Galatians to what was really transpiring as a result of the agitators being in their midst. Notice that the verb **become** (ginomai) is in the [perfect tense](#) which depicts a continued state or condition.

And note how ironic that these Judaizing enemies of the Gospel were calling Paul the enemy!



**MacArthur** - The Galatian believers who had succumbed to the Judaizing heresy were guilty of spiritual defection. Nothing tears the heart of a faithful pastor, teacher, youth worker, or missionary so much as seeing someone he has led to the Lord turn away from the faith. How much more does such defection grieve the Lord Himself?...The implication is that on a second trip to Galatia by Paul some of the church members there had already come under the influence of the Judaizers and had begun to doubt the truth of salvation by faith alone, which they had learned and accepted from him. The gospel of legalism had become more attractive to them than the gospel of grace, and the man who had been their beloved friend had become to them like an enemy. Many people appreciate a preacher or teacher only as long as he says what they want to hear. The confused and defecting believers in Galatia had once greatly admired Paul, but now they looked on him as their enemy, because he confronted them with the truth about the genuine gospel of God, which had saved them, and the false teaching of the Judaizers, which led them back into the bondage of legalism. (See context [The MacArthur New Testament Commentary](#))

**Spurgeon on become your enemy** - There come times with all God's servants when certain people proclaim something fresh and new in doctrine, and then the old messenger of God, who was blessed to them, comes to be despised. I have lived long enough to see dozens of very fine fancies started, but they have all come to nothing. I daresay I shall see a dozen more, and they will all come to nothing. But here I stand. I am not led astray either by novelties of excitement or novelties of doctrine. The things which I preached at the first, I preach still, and so I shall continue, as God shall help me. But I know, in some little measure, what the apostle meant when he said, "Am I therefore become your enemy, because I tell you the truth?"

**Enemy** (hostile) (2190)(**echthros** from **éχthos** = hatred, enmity; noun = **echthra** = enmity, hostility) is an adjective which pertains to manifesting hostility or being at enmity with another, where enmity is a deep seated animosity or hatred which may be open or concealed or a "deep-rooted hatred." In Galatians 4:16 the word is used in the active sense which means to means to be hateful, to be hostile toward, to be at enmity with or to be an adversary of someone, in this case of the apostle Paul.

And why or how did these Galatian believers become his **enemy**? Is this not a sad irony? The Jews had accomplished stirring up animosity against Paul by telling them lies and Paul was their **enemy** because he was **telling** them **the truth!** We know who these evil Jews' father was from John 8:44 where Jesus declared to those Jews (who had initially professed belief in Him [Jn 8:30] but would soon try to stone Him [Jn 8:58-59])

"You are of your father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies."

**Spurgeon on by telling you the truth** - There are many who have incurred enmity through speaking the gospel very plainly, for the natural tendency of man is toward ceremony, toward some form of legal righteousness: he must have something **aesthetic**, something that delights his sensuous nature, something that he can see and hear (**ED**: In contrast to 2 Cor 5:7), to mix up that with the simplicity of faith. Paul was as clear as noonday against everything of that kind, and so the Galatians got at last to be angry with him. Well, he could not help that, but it did grieve him.

**A T Robertson** quips "It is always a risky business to speak the truth, the whole truth. It may hit and hurt." (Ed: Yes, but also may hit and help and it is far more "risky" for that person's soul if we never speak the truth to them! Are you willing to take a risk this week? If so do it filled with prayer, the Spirit and the Word.) ([Galatians 4 - Robertson's Word Pictures in the New Testament](#))

**Telling...the truth** (present tense)(226)(**aletheuo** from **alethes** = true, real, actual, not counterfeit) in the only 2 NT uses (Gal 4:16, Eph 4:15) means to be truthful, to tell the truth, to speak reality (truth) into someone by making it a matter of record of what God deems is truth.

**Bultmann on aletheuo** - "it is more likely that it means "to preach the truth," i.e., the Gospel" (See [Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, Volume I](#))

**Gary Hill on aletheuo** - "Accordingly, **alētheuō** (literally, "to truth") includes Spirit-led confrontation to tell the truth, so others can also live in God's reality rather than personal illusion." "To truth" (alētheuō) seeks God's reality to become known in the inner man through faith ("God's inworked persuasion"). Note the close connection of the two terms in Eph 4:13-15. Learning new levels of truth happens through revelation which is often supra-logical and "by-passes" (supersedes) our natural senses. Telling truth affirms reality as God defines or sees it. Morris adds, "alētheuō in Eph 4:15 is normally understood as 'speaking the truth in love,' and this may be the sense of it. But in English we do not have a verb meaning 'to truth,' and it is worth bearing in mind that sometimes in the New Testament truth is a quality of action as well as of speech (e.g. Jn 3:21). It is quite possible that the writer means that Christians are to act truly, and that if they do they will act in love" (Testaments of Love, 237)." ([Discovery Bible](#))

**J Vernon McGee** - I had always wanted to place on the pulpit, facing the preacher, the words, "Sir, we would see Jesus." A very fine officer of the church I served in downtown Los Angeles did this for me after he heard me express this desire. There is another verse



I wanted to place on the audience side of the pulpit, but I never had the nerve to do it. It is these words of Paul: "Am I therefore become your enemy, because I tell you the truth?" As you know, many folk today really don't want the preacher to tell the truth from the pulpit. They would much rather he would say something complimentary that would smooth their feathers and make them feel good. We all like to have our backs rubbed, and there is a lot of back-rubbing from the contemporary pulpit rather than the declaration of the truth. (See context in [Thru the Bible](#))

**Galatians 4:17 They eagerly seek you, not commendably, but they wish to shut you out so that you will seek them.**

**KJV** Galatians 4:17 They zealously affect you, but not well; yea, they would exclude you, that ye might affect them.

**Hendriksen** These people are zealously courting you for no commendable purpose: on the contrary, they want to isolate you, in order that you may zealously court them.

- **They eagerly seek you**, Gal 6:12,13; Matthew 23:15; Romans 10:2; 16:18; 1 Corinthians 11:2; 2 Corinthians 11:3,13-15; Philippians 2:21; 2 Peter 2:3,18
- **Shut you out** 1 Corinthians 4:8,18
- Galatians 4 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries
- Galatians 4:12-20 - Don Anderson [Galatians Study 8; More Notes on Galatians Study 8](#)
- [Warren Wiersbe's sermon Born Free - Galatians 4](#) - one of the simplest and most profound expositions you will ever hear on Galatians 4!

## **NON-COMMENDABLE COURTING OF GALATIAN BELIEVERS**

**Commendable** means worthy of high praise, deserving praise; admirable, creditable or meritorious; doing something in an admirable manner. If you describe someone's behaviour as commendable, you approve of it or are praising it. Paul is stating exactly the opposite -- the behavior of the Judaizers is not worthy of praise, which is an [understatement!](#)

**They** - Who is **they**? The context would support the interpretation that it was those (presumably Judaizers) who have misled them about Paul and the truth of their freedom in the Gospel. (Read Galatians 1:7, 9+, Galatians 2:4+)

In short, **they** are evil seducers! Are they not imitating their father the devil by laying seductive snares for the Galatians (cf 1 Ti 3:7, 2 Ti 2:26)

**Couch** writes "**They** did not have a Christ-centered desire, but rather a selfish one. They wanted to convert these new Christians to rethink their salvation and make them return to legalism. They wanted to isolate those who were trusting in Christ. This is generally the practice of cults—to make their followers exclusive, to keep them from talking with others. Paul writes, "**They eagerly seek you, not commendably, but they wish to shut you out**"—that is, they wanted to keep the Galatians from the company or influence of Paul, or from the companionship of others who might think the same way, to the end that the Galatians "may seek them" (Twenty-First Century Biblical Commentary Series – The Books of Galatians & Ephesians: By Grace through Faith)

**Robertson** comments that "in contrast with Paul's plain speech the Judaizers bring their fawning flattery." ([Galatians 4 - Robertson's Word Pictures in the New Testament](#))

Paul gives a parallel truth about these enemies of the Gospel in chapter 6 writing...

Those who desire to make a good showing in the flesh try to compel you to be circumcised, simply so that they will not be persecuted for the cross of Christ. For those who are circumcised do not even keep the Law themselves, but they desire to have you circumcised so that they may boast in your flesh.(Gal 6:12,13+)

**They eagerly seek you, not commendably** (see [kalos](#) below) - **NET** "They court you eagerly, but for no good purpose." **NLT** gives us a good sense paraphrasing it "Those false teachers are so eager to win your favor, but their intentions are not good." **CEV** paraphrases it as they "pay a lot of attention." **REB** they "lavish attention" on them.

**Garlington** on **they eagerly seek you** - the Judaizers' zeal for the Gentile Galatians meant pulling out all the stops to bring them into conformity to Moses

**MacArthur** has a very interesting note - The term translated **seek** carries the idea of taking a serious interest in someone and was

often used of a man courting a woman. "The Judaizers talk like they really care for you," Paul was saying, "but they are false suitors who have no genuine love for or interest in you or your welfare." Most cults show keen interest and even affection toward prospective members, promising them great personal fulfillment and happiness. As with the legalism of the Judaizers, the true nature of their spiritual enslavement is hidden. (See context in [Galatians MacArthur New Testament Commentary](#))

**David Guzik** explains that "Many cults use a technique informally known as **'love bombing.'**" They overwhelm a prospective member with attention, support, and affection. Yet it isn't really a sincere love for the prospect; it is really just a technique to gain another member. Christians can use the same technique in some way or another. ([Galatians 4 – Heirs and Slaves, Grace and Law](#))

**Eagerly seek** ([present tense](#)) (2206) ([zeloo](#) from [zelos](#) = zeal in turn from [zeo](#) = to be hot, to boil, to be fervent; English zeal) means to be fervent or zealous in either a positive or as in the present passage a negative sense.

**Utley** on [zeloo](#) - "Zealous," from the root "to burn," had two connotations in Koine Greek: (1) the affection of young lovers; and (2) envy of another. These strong emotions characterized the activity of the sweet-talking false teachers toward the Galatian churches, but their activity derived from selfish motivation. ([Galatians 4](#))

**Not commendably** - Literally "not good." So absolutely not for any good purpose!

**Ben Witherington:** "Like the zeal Paul himself had previously exhibited, this zeal also is not according to knowledge and not going in a proper direction, it is to no good end" (See context in [Grace in Galatia](#)).

**But** - This term of contrast - the Judaizers were seeking the Galatian believers not for good but for bad, which he explains.

**They wish** is the verb [thelo](#) is a word which Vine says "expresses not simply a desire, but a determined and constant exercise of the will." And here wish is in the [present tense](#) indicating this is their continual evil desire!

**To shut you out so that you will seek them** - **NLT** says "They are trying to shut you off from me so that you will pay attention only to them." **Hendriksen** has "on the contrary, they want to isolate you, in order that you may zealously court them." **So that** (hina) gives the purpose for the Judaizers shutting out the Galatian believers and the purpose was that they would seek them (and their false teaching) instead of Paul and the truth of the Gospel. This reminds me of one of the main tactics in warfare - cut the supply lines and surround their forces so that they are easily defeated. Here it is applicable to spiritual warfare.

**MacArthur** explains that "The Judaizers had no interest in the Galatian believers beyond entrapping them in legalism. They were like the scribes and Pharisees to whom Jesus said, "You travel about on sea and land to make one proselyte; and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves" (Mt. 23:15). Their true wish and objective was to shut ... out the Galatians from God's grace and gain recognition and acceptance for themselves (implied in the phrase that you may seek them). Their true motivation was "to make a good showing in the flesh" (Gal 6:12). (See [Galatians MacArthur New Testament Commentary](#))

**Donald Campbell** on **shut you out** - They wanted to alienate (ekkleisai, literally "to lock out") the Galatians from Paul and his teaching so that they would be shut up instead to the false teachers and their influence. In an interesting double use of the verb "**be zealous**" Paul said that the Judaizers were **zealous to win ... over** the Galatians so that the latter would be **zealous for** the Judaizers! (See context in [Bible Knowledge Commentary](#))

**David Guzik** - The zeal cultivated by legalism is often more a zeal for the group itself than for Jesus Christ. Though they name the name of Jesus, in practice the group itself is exalted as the main focus, and usually exalted as the last refuge of the true "super-Christians." (Shut...out) literally means to "lock you up." For now, the legalists are courting the Galatians, but once they have alienated them from Jesus and from Paul, the legalists will demand that the Galatians serve them. Legalism is almost always associated with some kind of religious bondage. ([Galatians 4 – Heirs and Slaves, Grace and Law](#))

**Shut...out** (1576) ([ekkleio](#) from [ek](#) = out + [kleio](#) = to shut) means literally to shut out. For example in secular Greek we find the following uses -- "be excluded from one's home city" or "be shut outside the door of the tower". **Ekkleio** means to eliminate, to not allow, to exclude from a thing.

**Utley** - The false teachers were jealous of the affection that the Galatian churches had shown Paul (cf. vv. 13–15). They wanted to alienate Paul so they could take his place! This may explain verse 18. ([Galatians 4](#))

**Wiersbe** asks "Is your Christian life moving forward into liberty or backward into bondage? Think carefully before you answer." (See context in [The Wiersbe Bible Commentary](#) or borrow [Be Free: An Expository Study of Galatians](#))

**Galatians 4:18** But it is good always to be eagerly sought in a commendable manner, and not only when I am present with you.

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KJV Galatians 4:18 But it is good to be zealously affected always in a good thing, and not only when I am present with you.

NET Galatians 4:18 However, it is good to be sought eagerly for a good purpose at all times, and not only when I am present with you.

NLT Galatians 4:18 If someone is eager to do good things for you, that's all right; but let them do it all the time, not just when I'm with you.

NIV Galatians 4:18 It is fine to be zealous, provided the purpose is good, and to be so always and not just when I am with you.

- **it is good always to be eagerly sought** Nu 25:11-13; Ps 69:9; 119:139; Isa 59:17; Jn 2:17; 1 Cor 15:58; Titus 2:14; Rev 3:19
- **I am present with you** Galatians 4:20; Philippians 1:27; 2:12
- Galatians 4 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries
- Galatians 4:12-20 - Don Anderson [Galatians Study 8; More Notes on Galatians Study 8](#)
- [Warren Wiersbe's sermon Born Free - Galatians 4](#) - one of the simplest and most profound expositions you will ever hear on Galatians 4!

## NOTHING WRONG WITH BEING ZEALOUS

**Zeal** is marked by active interest and enthusiasm and is a good thing if it is directed at the right object and has the right motives. Paul encourages rightly directed zeal.

**But** - Term of contrast - the non-commendable manner versus the commendable manner.

**Vine** adds that this **but** is Paul's way of "introducing a general reflection intended to [obviate](#) (prevent) the deduction (THAT HIS READERS MIGHT HAVE) from what had just been said (REFERRING TO THE "NEGATIVE" STATEMENT PAUL HAD MANDE IN VERSE 17), that the apostle was unwilling that anyone but himself should show an interest in them." (Collected Writings of W E Vine) (**ED**: To the contrary, he was willing to accept and commend anyone who would have come to them with good "Gospel motives.")

**It is good always to be eagerly sought in a commendable manner**- The **NIV** has an excellent rendering - "It is fine to be zealous, provided the purpose is good." Paul is saying in essence it is good if the Galatians were sought after by anyone who had the admirable goal of seeking to evangelize, edify or equip them with the Gospel. Paul was not opposed to zeal of others who might come into the midst of the Galatians, but only insisted that they always have good purposes. Paul had come to them zealously with the Gospel that liberated, but the Judaizers had come zealously with legalism that enslaved.

**Thomas Schreiner** - If one is zealous for what is good, one's life will be pleasing to God. In other words, Paul was not jealous for his own reputation. If others had arrived in Galatia, preached the gospel, and strengthened the Galatians in the faith, he would have rejoiced. (See context in [Galatians](#) - ZECNT)

**Campbell** - Acknowledging that it was good for anyone to be sought after, Paul nonetheless insisted that the intention must be honorable, but in the case of the Judaizers it was not. (See context in [Bible Knowledge Commentary](#))

**Commendable** ("for a good purpose" - NET)([2570](#))([kalos](#)) describes that which is inherently excellent or intrinsically good, providing some special or superior benefit. It always provided that the interest taken is of a healthy character and for a worthy end.

**MacDonald** paraphrases it "Paul says, in effect, "I do not mind others fussing over you, even when I am absent from you, as long as they are doing so with pure motives and for a good cause." (See [Believer's Bible Commentary](#).)

**And not only when I am present with you** - The **NIV** translation has "and to be so always and not just when I am with you." **Guzik** explains that "Paul wanted the Galatians to be zealous for what is good when he was absent, not only when he was present among them." ([Galatians 4 – Heirs and Slaves, Grace and Law](#))

Paul alludes to laboring for these Galatians in Gal 2:5+ "But we did not yield in subjection to them for even an hour, so that ([PURPOSE](#)) the truth of the gospel would remain with you."

**W E Vine** has a good explanation of **not only when I am present with you** - the apostle, having an understanding in the ways of God, that one sows and another reaps, that one plants and another waters, that one lays a foundation and another builds thereon,

and having also the spiritual welfare of the converts truly at heart, **was glad that others as well as he should labor among them**. His opposition to the Judaizers was not a merely unworthy jealousy lest any other servant of Christ should gain a place in the esteem and affection of those to whom he had brought the knowledge of Christ. From such pettiness his mind was happily free; cp. his language in 1 Corinthians 3:5 and in Philippians 1:15–18. True ministry of the true gospel he could only encourage, but those who would lead the converts away therefrom must be vigilantly and unrelentingly opposed. That the apostle's own interest in them had not ceased with his labors among them the present letter was sufficient evidence. (Collected Writings of W E Vine)

**Guzik** explains that "The Galatian Christians were no doubt impressed by the zeal of the legalists. The legalists were so sincere, so passionate about their beliefs (ED: SEE Ro 10:2). Paul agreed that it is good to be zealous – but only in a good thing always. Zeal in the service of a lie is a dangerous thing. **Paul knew this well, because before he became a Christian, he had plenty of zeal; even persecuting the church** (Acts 7:58-60+, Acts 8:1-2+, see his zeal especially in Acts 8:3+, cf Acts 22:3+, Phil 3:6+). Later, Paul looked back at that time of great zeal in the service of a lie and deeply regretted it (1 Cor 15:9+, 1 Ti 1:15). ([Galatians 4 – Heirs and Slaves. Grace and Law](#))

**J Vernon McGee** - Paul is saying that it is good to seek that which is the very best, but these Judaizers are after you in order to scalp you. They want to put your scalp on their belt and be able to say, "We were over at Galatia, and we had so many converts"—which, of course, would not be actually true. (See context [Thru the Bible](#))

**Todd Wilson** - The agitators are self-centered, not Christ-centered. They want to use the Galatians, not serve them. They share in "the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy" (Luke 12:1+). But Paul worries that they've leavened the whole lump (cf. Gal 5:9). So he further strengthens his appeal to the Galatians by drawing a sharp contrast between himself and the agitators. Paul, we must remember, is calling the Galatians not simply away from the agitators but back to himself. Thus he presents the Galatians with two divergent portraits—one of the agitators and one of himself—and leaves the Galatians to choose which they'll have. Paul has already displayed the aims and intentions of the agitators (Gal 4:17). Now he must paint his own portrait in the remaining verses of this passage (Gal 4:18-20). And as he does so, the contrast at once becomes clear. While the agitators pursue the Galatians for personal gain, the suffering apostle serves them with his purposeful pain. (See context [Galatians: Gospel-Rooted Living](#))

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**Spurgeon** - The Responsibility of Those Who Would Win Souls - Paul speaks of himself as the very mother of those to whom he was the means of conversion: "My children, for whom I am having birth pains again, until Christ is formed in you" (Gal 4:18). God so uses those who seek to win souls that, as it were, He puts the very paternity of those souls upon them. Let it teach us this lesson that if God works by means, as He does, He will not have us neglect those means, or we will be found unfit for the Master's use. Someone complains that there are no conversions under his ministry; will he ask himself whether he has aimed at conversion? A Sunday school teacher says that she has seen no girls in her class brought to Christ; has her teaching been such as to tend that way? Has Christ been set forth in His sweet attraction? Has prayer been offered that the girls might come to Christ? Have they been pleaded with? Have they been taught their lost condition? Have they been shown the excellence of Christ as a Savior? You see, if we live in a region of means suited to ends, it is the path of wisdom to find out the means best suited to the desired end, and to use it in dependence upon God. I believe that if we preach Christ crucified with crucified hearts, if we set forth Christ with earnest longing that men may see Him, they will see Him. I believe, teachers in the Sunday school, that if Christ is taught in the classes earnestly and prayerfully, the children will receive Him. Ask those who have tried it. They would tell you that though they may have been at times slack in their service, God has never been slack concerning His promise. His word has not returned to Him void; it has accomplished what He pleased and prospered in the thing for which He sent it. Let there be no listless indifference, no falling back upon the sovereignty of God as an excuse for halfheartedness.

#### Galatians 4:19 My children, with whom I am again in labor until Christ is formed in you--

KJV Galatians 4:19 My little children, of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you, 20 I desire to be present with you now, and to change my voice; for I stand in doubt of you.

- **My children** 1 Corinthians 4:14; 1 Timothy 1:2; Titus 1:4; Philemon 1:10,19; James 1:18; 1 John 2:1,12; 5:21
- **with whom I am again in labor** Numbers 11:11,12; Isaiah 53:11; Luke 22:44; Phil 1:8; 2:17; Col 2:1; 4:12; Hebrews 5:7; Rev 12:1,2
- **until Christ is formed in you** Ro 8:29; 13:14; Eph 4:24; Phil 2:5; Col 1:27; 3:10
- Galatians 4 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries
- Galatians 4:12-20 - Don Anderson [Galatians Study 8; More Notes on Galatians Study 8](#)
- [Warren Wiersbe's sermon Born Free - Galatians 4](#) - one of the simplest and most profound expositions you will ever hear on Galatians 4!

## PAUL'S PASSIONATE PLEA FOR THEIR CHRIST-LIKENESS

**My children** ("my born ones"), **with whom I am again in labor** - Note his tender touch calling them **My children** (KJV "My little children" - [teknion](#)), for indeed many were like "spiritual children" to him for they had first heard the Gospel from him, which the Spirit used to save them. Notice the word **again**, which indicates he was **in labor** with them before, presumably when he first proclaimed the Gospel to them (see Acts 13 and Acts 14). Because of what Paul has learned about the adverse effects of the Judaizers on his "spiritual children" in Galatia, he is again having "labor pains." The first time Paul was in labor for their deliverance from slavery to idolatry and now he is in travail for them to be delivered from the slavery of legalism of the Jews (Gal 4:9+). Paul's addressing them tenderly as **my children** (*tekna mou*) uses an expression found only here in Paul's epistles.

Ponder what Paul is saying here by using this maternal metaphor to describe a second bout of labor pains -- he so loves them that he is willing to go through the incredibly painful process of childbirth (men don't fully grasp the pain) again for their sakes.

**W E Vine** - There is a suggestion of reproach in his words, as though he would ask them whether they had ever heard of a mother enduring the birth pangs twice for her children. There is no thought here of a second regeneration necessitated by their defection; for one reason because the apostle does not charge them with having actually turned away from the true gospel, but only with being in danger of doing so. (Collected Writings)

The mental/emotional pain Paul is feeling reminds me of the painful words of Jesus when He declared

"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, just as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not have it!" (Lk 13:34+)

Paul used a similar maternal figure of speech in 1 Th 2:7-8 declaring

"But we proved to be gentle among you, as a nursing mother tenderly cares for her own children. Having so fond an affection for you, we were well-pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God but also our own lives, because you had become very dear to us. "

**Matthew Henry** - That the apostle might the better dispose these Christians to bear with him in the reproofs which he was obliged to give them, he here expresses his great affection to them, and the very tender concern he had for their welfare: he was not like them - one thing when among them and another when absent from them. Their disaffection to him had not removed his affection from them; but he still bore the same respect to them which he had formerly done, nor was he like their false teachers, who pretended a great deal of affection to them, when at the same time they were only consulting their own interest; but he had a sincere concern for their truest advantage; he sought not theirs, but them. They were too ready to account him their enemy (Gal 4:16+), but he assures them that he was their friend; nay, not only so, but that he had the bowels of a parent towards them. He calls them his **children**, as he justly might, since he had been the instrument of their conversion to the Christian faith; yea, he styles them his **little children**, which, as it denotes a greater degree of tenderness and affection to them, so it may possibly have a respect to their present behaviour, whereby they showed themselves too much like little children, who are easily wrought upon by the arts and insinuations of others.

**John Stott** has an interesting comment - "He likens his pain to the pangs of childbirth. He had been in labour over them previously at the time of their conversion, when they were brought to birth; now their [backsliding](#) has caused him another confinement. He is in labour again. The first time there had been a "miscarriage;" this time he longs that Christ will be truly formed in them." (Message of Galatians) (ED: "**Miscarriage**" implies they had "professed" Christ, but not truly "possessed" Christ. That is always a concern when one is used by God in someone's apparent conversion -- is it the real thing? Most of us have experienced evangelizing someone who apparently received Christ and then at some later time denied Him with their life and lips. Whether that is what Paul is concerned about is difficult to discern but it is something to consider.) (See context [The Message of Galatians](#))

**Children** (5043) ([teknon](#) from [tikto](#) = bring forth, bear children, be born) is strictly a child produced, male or female, son or daughter. **Teknon** is thus a child as viewed in relation to his or her parents or family. In the plural, **teknon** is used generically of descendants, posterity or children.

As noted above the **KJV** uses [teknion](#) (not *teknon*) which means "**little children**" a term of affection used by a teacher to his disciples under circumstances calling for tender appeal:

**MacArthur** comments - You have already experienced the new birth, but now you are acting as if you need to be spiritually born all over again. You make me feel like a mother who has to deliver the same baby twice." ([Did Paul Question the Salvation of the Galatians?](#))



**Utley** - Paul often used familial metaphors because of their warmth. He called himself a father in 1 Cor. 4:15 and 1 Thess. 2:11 and here, a mother (cf. 1 Thess. 2:7). ([Galatians 4](#))

**I am...in labor pains** ([present tense](#))([5605](#))(**odino** from **odin** = birth pang) literally means for the mother to suffer birth pains when her baby is born. Then generally the word meant to be in pain as when a mother experiences birth pangs. The idea is to suffer greatly in Galatians 4:19. In Gal 4:27 the meaning is to be in pain as when a woman is in travail. Cp. the corresponding noun, [odin](#), in 1 Thessalonians 5:3+ and the somewhat similar metaphor in Colossians 2:1+ ("I want you to know how great a **struggle** [\[agon\]](#) I have on your behalf").

In Rev 12:2+ John writes "and she was with child; and she cried out, **being in labor** and in pain to give birth." Tony Garland comments on this passage noting that "Although Scripture is replete with instances of women experiencing birth pangs, this is one instance where the pain is both **symbolic** and **literal** for it finds its fulfillment in the virgin birth of Christ by Mary." (See [complete comment for more detailed explanation](#)).

**Gilbrant** - At first this ancient word most likely meant to suffer birth pangs during labor. In secular Greek literature it is used in this sense; however, in a broader, almost metaphoric sense it expresses the emergence of pain, travail, and sorrow from any cause (Bertram, "ōdin," Kittel, 9:667). In the Septuagint ōdinō predominately translates chîl, "to writhe, be in labor," or "give birth." It is generally used in reference to the act of giving birth, often with emphasis on the pain and anguish involved. For instance, Isaiah 66:7 says, "Before she goes into labor, she gives birth; before the pains (ōdin) come upon her, she delivers a son" (NIV). The woman avoids the anguish of childbirth expressed by ōdinō. Elsewhere ōdinō can refer merely the process of childbirth without the emphasis on pain: "Thy mother brought thee forth" (Song of Solomon 8:5). In the New Testament the verb occurs only three times (Galatians 4:19,27; Revelation 12:2), although its related noun appears in four other passages. In Galatians 4:19 Paul described his anguish and concern for the believers as "suffering birth pangs." The pregnant woman in Revelation 12:2 suffers birth pangs.

**Donald Campbell** on **Christ is formed in you** - This expression describes the Christian life as a kind of reincarnation of Christ in a believer's life. This is in fact God's ideal and purpose—for Christ to live His life in and then through each believer (cf. Gal. 2:20). (See context in [Bible Knowledge Commentary](#))

**Martin Luther** on **until Christ is formed in you** - "The Word of God falling from the lips of the apostle or minister enters into the heart of the hearer. The Holy Ghost impregnates the Word so that it brings forth the fruit of faith. In this manner every Christian pastor is a spiritual father who forms Christ in the hearts of his hearers."

**Guzik** comments that "Paul knew that his work of forming Christ in them was not complete until they stayed in a place of trusting Jesus." ([Galatians 4 – Heirs and Slaves, Grace and Law](#))

**Until Christ is formed in you** - This descriptions speaks of progressive sanctification or growth in Christ-likeness. Paul's desire is to see the believers grow in Christ as well as be delivered from the false teachers. Paul shows us that evangelism is only part of a pastor's work, for once they are born again into the Kingdom of God, the pastor is then to feed the flock to grow them in grace and knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. And this is hard work as Paul explained in Col 1:29+

"For this purpose (THEY THEY WOULD BE COMPLETE IN CHRIST - Col 1:28) also I **labor** ([kopiao](#) - [present tense](#)), striving ([agonizomai](#)) (HOW IS THIS POSSIBLE- NATURAL WORK DONE IN SUPERNATURAL POWER) according to His power ([dunamis](#)), which mightily works ([energeo](#) - [present tense](#)) within me."

Paul had a similar desire for the saints in Ephesus -

"until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ. 14 As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men (COMPARE THE JUDAIZERS IN GALATIA!), by craftiness in deceitful scheming; 15 but speaking the truth in love, we are **to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ**," (Eph 4:13-15+)

Another word to describe Christ being formed in a believer is discipleship.

- [Make Disciples 1](#)
- [Make Disciples 2](#) - [Begins study of Five Most Important Passages for Believers](#)
- [Make Disciples 3](#) - [Chart comparing Filled with the Spirit and the Word](#)
- [Make Disciples 4](#)
- [Make Disciples 5](#)
- [Make Disciples 6](#)
- [Make Disciples 7](#)



- [Make Disciples 8](#)

**John MacArthur** - The verb (*morphoō*) carries the idea of essential form rather than outward shape, and therefore refers to **Christlike character**. Christlikeness is the goal of the believer's life. "As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him," he exhorted the church at Colossae (Col. 2:6; cf. Ro 13:14). God has predestined believers "to become conformed to the image of His Son" (Ro 8:29). "We all, with unveiled face beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit" (2 Cor. 3:18+). The Father sent the Son to earth not only to die that men might be saved but also to live as the divine example for those who are saved. ([Did Paul Question the Salvation of the Galatians?](#) or [Galatians: The Wondrous Grace of God](#))

**David Platt** - This is the freedom that Paul is talking about-Christ shaping us, molding us, changing us, and forming us into His image so that we might be liberated to experience life in Him, for Him, through Him, by Him, and with Him. This is my prayer for the church I pastor, that Christ would be formed in them. (**ED: THIS WOULD BE A GOOD PRAYER FOR EVERY PASTOR TO PRAY FOR HIS FLOCK.**) ([Free to Grow](#))

**Zodhiates** says Paul describes the believers in Galatia (and all of believers) "as a little child who needs to mature until the very image of Christ be impressed upon his heart."

**Gilbrant** writes "Paul used the analogy of a woman's travailing birth pangs to describe his intense desire and prayer that the nature and character of Christ "be formed" in the lives of the Galatian believers. In order that the [morphe](#), or essential nature of the Christ-life, may come into being in them, Christ must not only be in each of them, but must also grow or "be formed" in them. This process of maturity into Christlikeness is not a mere outward conformity to Christ but a progressive inward transformation of one's character. Christian growth through the Spirit's work is a major theme in Paul's writings. The third-century church father Hippolytus underscored this image of Christian growth in his use of *morphoō*: "*The true Christian is being formed by the instruction of the Lord*" (Behm, "morphoō," Kittel, 4:753). (Complete Biblical Library Greek-English Dictionary)

**Formed** (only Biblical use)([3445](#))(**morphoo** from [morphe](#) = form, shape) describes taking on a form that embodies a particular inner essence. To become developed into a distinct entity (in this case the likeness of Christ). To form, fashion, originally used of artists who shaped their material into an image. **Morphoo** was used in a medical sense for fetal development. **Morphoo** in this context means until Christ's nature be formed in you, the idea being that their essence would be Christ-like and speaks of inner not outward shape. In short it speaks of the formation of Christ-like character. Paul wanted Christ used as a mold to shape the lives of the Galatians.

**Vine** - With *morphoō* may be compared [metamorphoo](#), which occurs in Matthew 17:2; Mark 9:2, of the change in the appearance of the Lord described by Luke in the words "the fashion of His countenance was altered," Lk 9:29+. The word *morphoō*, it is important to note, **does not refer to what is outward and transient, but to what is inward and real**. Hence on the Mount of Transfiguration that glory which was His own, essentially and eternally, shone out for a moment through the veil that concealed it during the days of His flesh. [Metamorphoo](#) occurs also in Romans 12:2 and in 2 Corinthians 3:18. The former of these passages reads, "And be not fashioned [*suschēmatizo* = to be made to resemble, as in 1 Pet. 1:14] according to this age: but **be ye transformed** by the renewing of your mind." Here an outward change in the character and conduct of the believer, to correspond with his inward spiritual condition, is intended. The second passage reads, "We all ... are [being] transformed into the same image."

In a parallel passage Paul wrote to the saints at Corinth that he was "always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested (made openly apparent, clearly revealed) in our body." (2 Cor 4:10)

The root word **morphe** is used in Isa 44:13 to describe an making of an idol "like the **form** (Lxx = *morphe*) of a man."

## W E Vine On Morphoo

When the apostle brought the gospel to the Galatian cities, his aim was not merely to induce men to change their religion, to forsake polytheism, the worship of many gods, for monotheism, the worship of one God; it was that they might receive life in Christ. So now his anxiety on their account was not merely that they should be intellectually persuaded of, and confirmed in, the true nature of the gospel and its conditions, but that the new life therein imparted might grow in them. Doctrine is not something alien from life. What a man believes affects his character and his conduct. Doctrine that exalts Christ makes for holiness; doctrine that detracts from the

excellence of His person, or from the completeness and sufficiency of His sacrifice, hinders, or prevents, the work of the Holy Spirit in the believer, which work is carried on by the presentation of Christ, in His essential deity, in His true manhood, in His perfect salvation; see John 16:13–15. The fatal defect of the doctrine of the Judaizers was that, by making something besides acceptance of Christ necessary to the obtaining of the promises, they presented a defective Savior. That Christ is supreme, Romans 9:5; sufficient, Colossians 1:19; “all and in all,” Col 3:11, nothing less than this is the apostle’s claim.

But if on this point the Galatians were misled, how could they experience the power of truth they denied? To submit to circumcision, to seek justification by law, was to be severed from Christ and to lose all that the gospel offered, see Gal 5:2–4. To trust Christ, and to trust Him alone, was to be justified from all things indeed, see Romans 3:28; 8:31–34; but more, it was to be “a new creation,” 2 Corinthians 5:17, to live in Christ, and to have Christ living in the heart; see Gal 2:20. Growth, moreover, is the evidence of life, and this the apostle desired for his converts that they might “all attain ... unto a full-grown man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ,” that they might “grow up in all things into ... Christ,” Ephesians 4:13–15. How this is to be accomplished may be learned from his prayer that Christ might dwell in their hearts through faith, 3:17, and from the exhortation of Philippians 2:5, “Have this mind in you which was also in Christ Jesus.” For as the exercise of faith occupies the heart with Christ the mind of Christ develops in the believer, and as a direct result of these inward processes his conduct is increasingly conformed to the example of Christ.

“That Christ may be formed in you” is, then, the desire of the apostle for the moral conformity of the believer to Christ here and now. The thought is similar to, or identical with, that of Philippians 3:10, “becoming conformed to His death.” But conformity to Christ, though it begins in the moral sphere, does not end there. In due time, that which is now inward and spiritual will extend also to that which is outward and physical, for “the body of our humiliation” will, at the coming of the Lord, be “conformed to the body of His glory,” Philippians 3:21.

The apostle’s mind here, however, is not so much on the future, and the final outcome in them of faith in Christ, as it is that he longs for some present and satisfying evidence to confirm his confidence that God had indeed begun a good work in them; if he were only assured of that the ultimate issue would not be in doubt; see Philippians 1:6. But the ordinance of God is that the believer must enter into willing cooperation with Him for his own perfecting into the image of His Son; see Romans 8:28, 29, marg. The formation of Christ in the believer is at once the purpose of God and the ambition, inwrought by the Spirit, of all who are taught of Him.

With *morphoō* may be compared *metamorphoō*, which occurs in Matthew 17:2; Mark 9:2, of the change in the appearance of the Lord described by Luke in the words “the fashion of His countenance was altered,” Lk 9:29. The word *morphoō*, it is important to note, does not refer to what is outward and transient, but to what is inward and real. Hence on the Mount of Transfiguration that glory which was His own, essentially and eternally, shone out for a moment through the veil that concealed it during the days of His flesh. *Metamorphoō* occurs also in Romans 12:2 and in 2 Corinthians 3:18. The former of these passages reads, “And be not fashioned [*suschēmatiso* = to be made to resemble, as in 1 Pet. 1:14] according to this age: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind.” Here an outward change in the character and conduct of the believer, to correspond with his inward spiritual condition, is intended. The second passage reads, “We all ... are [being] transformed into the same image.”

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**Warren Wiersbe - Christian Freedom: Born Free** (Listen to the related sermon by Wiersbe - [Christian Freedom: Born Free](#))  
(Also borrow [Be Free: An Expository Study of Galatians](#))

## **I. Introduction.**

A. Text: Galatians 4:19.

B. Abraham signifies faith. Sarah represents the covenant of grace. Isaac symbolizes the believer. Ishmael stands for the flesh, the old nature. Hagar represents the old covenant--the law.

C. The conflicts that Christians engage in today are the spirit versus the flesh and law versus grace.

## **II. The spirit versus flesh.**

### **A. The new nature is different in birth.**

1. We were born into the old nature.

2. God rejects the first birth. If we have only been born once we are sinners and will die in our sins.

3. The second birth preserves us from the second death.

### **B. The new nature behaves differently.**

1. The new nature brings joy.

2. The new nature is submissive to the Father.

### **C. The new nature has a different blessing.**

1. The new nature makes us heirs with God.
2. The old nature gives us nothing. 3. The new nature gives us freedom.
4. The new nature gives blessing because it is in fellowship with the Father.

### **III. The law versus grace.**

- A. The law was added--it was never intended to be the first wife.
- B. The law was a temporary servant to reveal sin.
- C. The law does not bring birth, it brings death.
- D. The law gives birth to slaves. E. The law was thrown out.
- F. The strength of sin was the law. (1 Corinthians 15)
- G. The law was never meant to return to the church.

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### **Soiled-Rag Masterpiece**

My little children, . . . I labor in birth again until Christ is formed in you. —Galatians 4:19

Galatians 4:13-20

An artist was once falsely accused of a crime and thrown into prison. Although allowed to take his brushes and paints with him, he had no way of obtaining a canvas.

One day in desperation he asked a guard for something upon which he might paint. Indifferently, the man picked up a dirty old handkerchief and tossed it to him, saying, "There, see what you can do with that soiled rag!"

The artist, being a Christian, painted on it his concept of the face of Jesus. Having labored long and diligently on the painting, he thought he would show it first of all to the man who had given him the dirty piece of cloth for a canvas. When the guard looked at the beautiful image, his heart was moved, and tears welled up in his eyes. The painting later became famous.

If one man could take an old, soiled rag and make it glow with such loveliness that a thoughtless, indifferent prison guard was moved to tears by it, just think what the Master Artist could do with our lives if we would let Him have His way with us.

In our sinfulness, we are just old "soiled rags," devoid of spiritual beauty. Yet the power of God's Holy Spirit can change us into a masterpiece of divine grace! ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#)) By Henry G. Bosch

Reflect & Pray

I am the Lord's—yet, teach me all it meaneth,  
All it involves of love and loyalty,  
Of holy service, full and glad surrender,  
And unreserved obedience unto Thee!  
—Bennett

The best commentary on the Bible is a Christ-filled life.

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### **True Freedom Galatians 4:19-5:1**

Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free. —Galatians 5:1

In 1776, the 13 British colonies in North America protested the limitations placed on them by the king of England and engaged in a struggle that gave birth to a brand-new republic. The infant nation soon adopted that now-famous document known as the Declaration of Independence.

Almost 2,000 years ago, the Lord Jesus cried out on the cross, "It is finished," proclaiming the believer's "declaration of independence." All of humanity was under the tyranny of sin and death. But Christ, the sinless One, took our place on Calvary and died for our sins. Having satisfied God's righteous demands, He now sets free for eternity all who trust in Him.

Paul wrote, "Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us" (Galatians 3:13). Romans 8 assures us, "There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus . . . . For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death" (vv.1-2). Galatians 5:1 urges all who have been redeemed to "stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free."

I thank God for the freedom I enjoy as a US citizen. But above all, believers everywhere can praise Him for the freedom that is found in Christ! ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))  
By Richard DeHaan

Reflect & Pray

Now are we free—there's no condemnation!  
Jesus provides a perfect salvation;  
"Come unto Me," O hear His sweet call!  
Come—and He saves us once for all.  
—Bliss

Our greatest freedom is freedom from sin.

**Galatians 4:20 but I could wish to be present with you now and to change my tone, for I am perplexed about you.**

KJV Galatians 4:20 I desire to be present with you now, and to change my voice; for I stand in doubt of you.

NLT Galatians 4:20 I wish I were with you right now so I could change my tone. But at this distance I don't know how else to help you.

- **I could wish to be present with you now** - 1 Corinthians 4:19-21; 1 Th 2:17,18; 1 Th 3:9
- Galatians 4 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries
- Galatians 4:12-20 - Don Anderson [Galatians Study 8; More Notes on Galatians Study 8](#)
- [Warren Wiersbe's sermon Born Free - Galatians 4](#) - one of the simplest and most profound expositions you will ever hear on Galatians 4!

### PAUL'S DESIRE TO BE PRESENT WITH THE GALATIANS

**but I could wish to be present with you now** - Paul like any loving parent expresses the thought that a personal visit might help resolve his complexity.

**Robertson** on **I could wish** - Imperfect active, I was wishing like Agrippa's use of eboulomēn in Acts 25:22, "I was just wishing. I was longing to be present with you just now (arti)." ([Galatians 4 - Robertson's Word Pictures in the New Testament](#))

**W E Vine** on **I could wish** - cp. Acts 25:22; Romans 9:3; though the word translated "could wish" is different in each place, the tense is the same. He was willing to come to them, but was unable to do so, therefore the ellipsis to be supplied is not "but I do not," it is "if that were possible."

**I could wish** (2309)(**thelo**) speaks of Paul's desire and willingness to come to them, although he was unable to do so.

**Thomas Schreiner** - The letter to the Galatians cannot replace a face-to-face encounter in which Paul can engage the Galatians in conversation. If he were present with them, he could respond in the dynamics of everyday life to each issue they raise. Since he is absent from them, however, he must resort to writing, not knowing how they will react. (Galatians - ZECNT)

**And to change my tone** - "change my tone of voice" (NET) Compare his "tone" in Gal 3:1, 3+ where he felt compelled to address them as "foolish Galatians."

**Couch** - Paul realized how difficult it was to communicate his true feelings in written instead of spoken words, which are accompanied by physical presence with eye contact, gestures, and tone of voice. **Luther**, who had his own problems with the effects of harsh words, wrote: "*The apostle wishes he were with them, so that he might temper and change his tone as he sees necessary. If he saw any of them troubled, he could temper his words so they would not be oppressed by them with more heaviness; conversely, if he saw others high-minded, he could reprehend them sharply, lest they should be too complacent and careless and eventually despise God.*" (Ibid)

**Robertson** has an interesting comment on **change my tone** - Paul could put his heart into his voice. The pen stands between them. He knew the power of his voice on their hearts. He had tried it before. ([Galatians 4 - Robertson's Word Pictures in the New Testament](#))

**For I am perplexed about you** - Paul is saying basically that he is at "[wits' end](#)" or at the limits of his mental resources. In English the idiom "[wits' end](#)" means to be "In a state of distress because one has no more patience or mental stamina, often after having dealt with some kind of problem or difficult situation. Why would Paul be perplexed? They had heard the truth of the Gospel and seemed to have genuinely believed the truth and yet now are falling so quickly for a lie! Recall how Paul had opened this letter "**I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel.**" (Gal 1:6+) **Schreiner** adds that "Paul was deeply puzzled over the Galatians' attraction to Judaism and the OT law. He was not completely sure what to say, and yet his feelings of perplexity did not paralyze him. He continues to prosecute his case in subsequent verses." (Ibid)

**NLT** paraphrase' interpretation of "**I am perplexed**" has "But at this distance I don't know how else to help you."

**Robertson** on **perplexed** - I am at a loss and know not what to do. Aporeō is from a privative and **poros**, way. I am lost at this distance from you. ([Galatians 4 - Robertson's Word Pictures in the New Testament](#))

**Couch** - Paul's purpose in writing was to induce the Galatian churches to cling to their liberty in Christ since they were born spiritually to freedom. He wants them to reject the yoke of legalistic slavery the Judaizers were trying to force on the Galatians. This is why he keeps asking in so many words: "What does the Scriptures say? Are you supposed to place yourselves back under the Mosaic Law?" Paul did not like to speak so harshly. He wished he could communicate with these believers without scolding, but he admits he was stymied by their change of doctrine and by their departure from the simplicity of the gospel of the grace of God. (Twenty-First Century Biblical Commentary Series – The Books of Galatians & Ephesians: By Grace through Faith)

**MacDonald** comments - This verse might mean that Paul was puzzled as to the true status of the Galatians. Their defection from the truth had left him with doubts. He would like to be able to change his tone and speak with certainty and conviction about them. Or perhaps he was perplexed as to their reaction to his Letter. He would rather be speaking with them in person. Then he could better express himself by changing the tone of his voice. If they were receptive to his rebukes, he could be tender. If, however, they were haughty and rebellious, he could be stern. As it was, he was perplexed about them; he could not tell what their reaction to his message would be. (See context [Believer's Bible Commentary](#))

**Vine** on **I am perplexed** - Apostle though he was, Paul was not exempt from the trials that attend the servants of Christ, and this was equally true of external experiences, persecutions and the like, and of experiences of the mind and heart, perplexities included; see 2 Corinthians 11:28. He who lives by faith, 2:20, must walk by faith, 2 Corinthians 5:7, and he who walks and serves by faith knows, indeed, that the end is sure, but knows not the intermediate steps. Information concerning the future of any particular believer, or of any particular church, was not vouchsafed to the apostle. There was always room for fear of the worst to stimulate him to fresh labors, see 1 Thessalonians 3:5, 10, always room for hope of the best to give him confidence that those labors would not be in vain; see 1 Thessalonians 5:23, 24, and cp. Philippians 1:6, 7.

**Constable** - Their irrational desire to become slaves to the Mosaic system and followers of the legalistic false teachers perplexed him.

**I am perplexed** ([present tense](#))(639)([aporeo/aporeomai](#) always used in the [middle voice](#) in NT) means literally to be without a way or path (Vine - "a" = negative + "*poros*" = a way). The idea is not to know which way to turn, to be at a loss, to be "dazed and confused", to be in doubt, to be disturbed

**Hendriksen** comments that "The passage is one of the finest practical applications of I Corinthians 13<sup>+</sup>, written by Paul himself. Though the Galatians have failed Paul, his love toward them never fails, for love is longsuffering and kind, and even now hopes all things." (Ibid)

**Spurgeon** - All his anxiety arose from their falling into ritualism and legalism. He wanted to see them living by faith upon Jesus and worshiping God with free spiritual worship. The fashionable religion of the present day is overlaid with pompous forms, and the plain gospel of salvation by faith in Jesus is despised. Nevertheless, to the doctrine of grace let us steadfastly cleave, for it alone is truth, and in it alone is salvation....The point of doubt was, that they had been led astray by legal teachers; they had been made to believe that, after all, there was something in outward ceremonies, something in the works of the law, and so they had come under bondage again.

In vain the trembling conscience seeks  
Some solid ground to rest upon;  
With long despair the spirit breaks,

Till we apply to Christ alone.

Should all the forms that men devise  
Assault my faith with treacherous art,  
I'd call them vanity and lies,  
And bind the gospel to my heart.

**McGee** - False teachers are often very attractive. I am amazed at the very fine presentation the cults make. I have watched them on television programs that are done to perfection. That is the subtle part of it. Everything is beautiful to look at, and those taking part are attractive individuals. Also they present a certain amount of truth. For example, I listened to a man who is a liberal give the Christmas story during the Christmas season. No one could have told it better than he did. It was an excellent presentation. But when he began to interpret it, I realized that he didn't even believe in the virgin birth of Christ. You see, the warning of Paul both to the Galatian and Corinthian (2 Cor 12:12–15) believers is very timely for our generation also. (See [Thru the Bible](#))

**Charles Swindoll** - As a pastor, what I find so disturbing about Paul's letter to the Galatians is not that its readers were stuck in a works mentality—most people in the world fit that description—but that although the Galatians had once embraced the message of grace, they decided to shift back to the message of works! In fact, Paul ended the last section with an exasperated exclamation: "I am perplexed about you" (Gal 4:20). (See context [Insights on Galatians, Ephesians](#))

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**David Guzik** ([enduringword](#)) - This section, Galatians 4:12-20, shows us principles for the **attitude for people in the church toward their pastor**.

- Their attitude must not be determined by his personal appearance or personality.
- Their attitude must not be determined by their own theological whims.
- Their attitude should be determined by his loyalty to the apostolic message in the Bible.

ii. This section, Galatians 4:12-20, shows us principles for the **attitude for the pastor towards the people** in his church.

- He must be willing to serve and sacrifice for his people.
- He must tell them the truth.
- He must love his people deeply; never for a selfish motive.
- He must desire to see more than mere excitement, but zeal for good things.
- He must desire to form Jesus in them, not himself in them. ([Galatians 4 – Heirs and Slaves, Grace and Law](#))

### Galatians 4:21 **Tell me, you who want to be under law, do you not listen to the law?**

KJV Galatians 4:21 Tell me, ye that desire to be under the law, do ye not hear the law?

NET Galatians 4:21 Tell me, you who want to be under the law, do you not understand the law?

GNT Galatians 4:21 Λ γερ μοι, ο πι ν μον θ λοντες ε ναι, τ ν ν μον ο κ κο ετε;

NLT Galatians 4:21 Tell me, you who want to live under the law, do you know what the law actually says?

ESV Galatians 4:21 Tell me, you who desire to be under the law, do you not listen to the law?

CSB Galatians 4:21 Tell me, those of you who want to be under the law, don't you hear the law?

NIV Galatians 4:21 Tell me, you who want to be under the law, are you not aware of what the law says?

NAB Galatians 4:21 Tell me, you who want to be under the law, do you not listen to the law?

NKJ Galatians 4:21 Tell me, you who desire to be under the law, do you not hear the law?

NJB Galatians 4:21 Tell me then, you are so eager to be subject to the Law, have you listened to what the Law says?

GWN Galatians 4:21 Those who want to be controlled by Moses' laws should tell me something. Are you really listening to what Moses' Teachings say?

NRS Galatians 4:21 Tell me, you who desire to be subject to the law, will you not listen to the law?

YLT Galatians 4:21 Tell me, ye who are willing to be under law, the law do ye not hear?



BBE Galatians 4:21 Say, you whose desire it is to be under the law, do you not give ear to the law?

- **Tell me, you who want to be under law** Galatians 4:9; 3:10,23,24; Romans 6:14; 7:5,6; 9:30-32; 10:3-10
- **do you not listen** Matthew 21:42-44; 22:29-32; John 5:46,47
- **to the law** John 10:34; 12:34; 15:25; Romans 3:19
- Galatians 4 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries
- Galatians 4:21-5:1 - Don Anderson [Galatians Study 9; More Notes on Galatians Study 9](#)
- [Warren Wiersbe's sermon Born Free - Galatians 4](#) - one of the simplest and most profound expositions you will ever hear on Galatians 4!

### Paul continues his appeal to his readers to drop their legalism

#### The appeal from the two contrasted covenants (Galatians 4:21-31)

- i. The question to those desiring to be under law (Galatians 4:21)
- ii. The story of Abraham's two sons (Galatians 4:22-23)
- iii. The allegorical interpretation of the story (Galatians 4:24-30)
  - a. The two mothers representing two covenants (Galatians 4:24a)
  - b. The description of the two covenants (Galatians 4:24b-28)
    1. The one representing a covenant of bondage (Galatians 4:24b-25)
    2. The other representing a covenant of freedom (Galatians 4:26-28)
  - c. The expulsion of the slave woman and her son (Galatians 4:29-30)
- iv. The conclusion from the story (Galatians 4:31)

## PAUL TURNS TO THE LAW TO DEFEND HIS CASE

In Galatians 4:21-31 Paul will continue to contrast grace and law, faith and works. In fact notice all of the contrasts Paul uses in this section to make his point clear. Use of contrasts is a great way to teach the truth (see terms of contrast). See [table summarizing multiple contrasts](#) in Galatians 4:21-31.

Do you have a clear picture that becoming a Christian is a choice between two different ways of seeking the blessing of God?

**R C Lenski** says: It has been well said that, although he is at a loss because he is so far away from the Galatians, the fertile mind of Paul, in his attempt to separate them from all legalism, finds another effective mode of approach. From personal appeal he turns to a clear case that is recorded in Scripture, which is illustrative of both bondage and freedom, the account of Hagar and Ishmael and of Sarah and Isaac. To the subjective and personal Paul thus adds the Scriptural and objective. (See context [The Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians](#))

**Martin Luther** - Here Paul would have closed his Epistle because he did not know what else to say. He wishes he could see the Galatians in person and straighten out their difficulties. But he is not sure whether the Galatians have fully understood the difference between the Gospel and the Law. To make sure, he introduces another illustration. He knows people like illustrations and stories. He knows that Christ Himself made ample use of parables. ([Galatians Commentary](#))

**Wiersbe** introduces this last section (Gal 4:21-31) - Since the Judaizers appealed to the Law, Paul accepts their challenge and uses the Law to prove that Christians are not under the Law. He takes the familiar story of Ishmael and Isaac (Gen. 16-21) and draws from it basic truths about the Christian's relationship to the Law of Moses. The events described actually happened, but Paul uses them as an **allegory**, which is a narrative that has a deeper meaning behind it. Perhaps the most famous allegory in the English language is John Bunyan's A Pilgrim's Progress, in which Bunyan traces Christian's experiences from the City of Destruction to heaven. In an allegory, persons and actions represent hidden meanings, so that the narrative can be read on two levels: the literal and the symbolic. Paul's use of Genesis in this section does not give us license to find "hidden meanings" in all the events of the Old Testament. If we take that approach to the Bible, we can make it mean almost anything we please. This is the way many false teachings arise. The Holy Spirit inspired Paul to discern the hidden meaning of the Genesis story. We must always interpret the Old Testament in the light of the New Testament, and where the New Testament gives us permission, we may search for hidden meanings. Otherwise, we must accept the plain statements of Scripture and not try to "spiritualize" everything. (See context in [Be Free Galatians](#) or borrow [Be Free: An Expository Study of Galatians](#))

**Ridderbos** says: So far as the tone of the writing goes, the conclusion of Chapter 4 differs strikingly from what has gone before. The affecting and strongly personal quality of verses 12 to 20 gives way to a more objective argument. In it, Paul once more, and now for the last time, sheds light on the great theme: the law and the gospel. (pp 172-3) (from [A Practical Study of GALATIANS](#))

**Vos** says: From personal appeal Paul now turns to an illustration from Scripture in an effort to separate the Galatians from legalism. Those who boast of their submission to the law and claim to be sons of Abraham forget that Abraham had two sons, the one of a freewoman and the other of a bondwoman. Blessing and inheritance belong to the former. Paul declares the legalistic Galatians to be descended from the latter. (See context in [Galatians: A Call to Christian Liberty](#))

**Ray Pritchard** introduces his sermon on Gal 4:21-31 with these comments - Almost all the commentators agree that this is the hardest passage in the book of Galatians. It's not easy to understand on a quick reading exactly what Paul means to say. Or perhaps more accurately, we know in general terms what he is trying to say; it's how he says it that trips us up. For that reason, many people skip right over these verses so they can get to the "good stuff" in chapter 5, especially the part about the fruit of the Spirit in 5:22-23. And I must admit that this passage does sound very strange to our ears. Paul's form of argument is very Jewish, even Rabbinical, which means that his first-century readers probably had no problems following him, but that same style can seem rather cold and clinical to 21st-century readers. To make matters more challenging, there are parts of this passage that we understand and parts that seem to make no sense at all. Most of us know something about Abraham and Sarah and we probably know something about Hagar and Ishmael as well. But what are we to make of a verse like this? "Now Hagar stands for Mount Sinai in Arabia and corresponds to the present city of Jerusalem, because she is in slavery with her children" (Galatians 4:25). It's not quite clear how Paul gets from Hagar to Mount Sinai to Jerusalem to a woman enslaved with her children. You don't hear very many sermons on that verse. I've never known anyone to choose Galatians 4:25 as his life text. Yet it's in the Bible, so it must be true and there must be a message that we need to hear...He is addressing people who want a hybrid religion that is part Jewish and part Christian. They intend to believe in Jesus plus they want to live under the law as a means of pleasing God and winning his favor. Everything in this passage is aimed at these confused believers who were sorely tempted (ED: THEY WERE GENTILES WHO WERE BEING ENTICED BY JUDAIZERS) to go under the Law of Moses. His point is, Have you considered the implications of what you are about to do? Seen from that background, this passage slowly comes into focus. He is arguing (from an Old Testament point of view) with people who want to take Jesus with them and go back to an Old Testament way of life. But you can't do that. You can have the law as a way of life (ED: OF COURSE IT IS NOT REALLY LIFE FOR IT IS A CURSE WHAT BRINGS DEATH - Gal 3:13) or you can have Jesus, but you can't have both. ([A Tale of Two Women: Are You a Child of Promise?](#))

**Hendriksen** says: Rigid adherence to law, as if this were the way to be saved, is exposed as being in reality nothing but bondage, spiritual slavery. Faith, on the contrary, spells freedom. Accordingly, this section, too, is true to the theme of the entire epistle, namely, "The gospel of justification by faith apart from law-works defended against its detractors." (Baker's NTC-Galatians)

**John Calvin** says: Having given exhortations adapted to touch the feelings, he follows up his former doctrine by an illustration of great beauty. Viewed simply as an argument, it would not be very powerful; but, as a confirmation added to a most satisfactory chain of reasoning, it is not unworthy of attention.

**Preacher's Outline and Sermon Bible** (Introduction to Gal 4:21-31) - The way to heaven is not by works nor by the law. A person cannot do enough works nor keep enough laws to become *perfectly good*. And for a person to live in God's presence he has to be perfect. What then is the way to heaven? If a person cannot be good enough nor do enough works to make it to heaven, how can he get there? By faith in the promise of God. God has promised heaven to those who believe on His Son—to those who genuinely trust Jesus Christ to save them. However, most people in the world do not believe the promise of God. They still think they have to earn and work their way into the favor of God—that they have to build up a long list of *good works* that will force God to accept them. They think that they have to make themselves righteous by being good and doing religious things in order to enter heaven. Therefore, they place themselves under the rules and regulations of the law and of religion, and they do the best they can to make it to heaven. This is the appeal of this passage; the person who approaches God through the works of religion and law must listen to *what the law really says*. (See context [Preacher's Outline and Sermon Bible](#))

**Swindoll** introduces this section - Like a masterful attorney, he uses the Judaizers' own methods of argument and biblical interpretation to disprove their position. He opens with a question (Gal 4:21), provides some historical background from the life of Abraham (Gal 4:22-23), then sets forth an allegory in typical Jewish form (Gal 4:24-27), ultimately applying the allegory to the Galatians' situation (Gal 4:28-31). After this fitting finale against the assailants of Christian freedom, Paul rests his case. (See [Insights on Galatians, Ephesians](#))

Paul will use the Old Testament to defend the truth of justification by faith, not by keeping the law. Paul will use Isaac and Ishmael and Sarah and Hagar to demonstrate the contrasts between Law and grace, works and faith. His argument crescendos to the point that he charges the Galatians to cast out the legalizers (see Gal 4:30).

**De Haan** says: THE question the Apostle Paul seeks to answer in Galatians was a question of law OR grace. It was not law AND grace, but law OR grace. It cannot be both. It is either one or the other. To say that we are saved by grace, and then kept by our works is to negate grace entirely, for then our final salvation depends upon our behavior and works instead of the grace of God. The desire to be kept by the works of the law is the result of a total misunderstanding of what the law really is and does. Once we understand the true purpose of the law, we would never want to be placed under it again. And so Paul asks the question, "Tell me, ye that desire to be under the law, don't you understand what the law does?" ([Studies in Galatians](#))

**Jack Arnold** - Many of Paul's converts to Christ were beginning to go back under the Mosaic Law for salvation after they had been saved by God's grace through faith in Jesus Christ. They were following the false teaching of the Judaizers and were ready to set aside grace and faith for law and works. These Galatians simply did not understand all the implications and ramifications of this move into the legalism of law. The law was never designed by God to give eternal life or spirituality, but it was given for the purpose of pointing out to men their sinfulness and showing them that they are condemned before a holy God. There are many people today who live under a law system for salvation. Their religion is legalistic and they imagine that the way to God is by the observance of certain rules. There are even professing Christians who turn the gospel into law. They suppose their relationship to God depends on a strict adherence to regulations, traditions and ceremonies. These poor souls, while sincere, are in bondage to legalism. ([The Incompatibility of law and Grace](#))

**Tell me** - Remember the context from Gal 4:20 - Paul is perplexed about why they had been drawn into legalism. He begins with a command in the [present imperative](#) to give him an answer. In so doing he is sounding a call to responsibility. Before he had been more tender, but now he shifts rather abruptly to a penetrating, commanding tone. His question is presumably directed primarily to the Galatians who were in danger of succumbing to legalism, but could also be seen as addressed to those Jews who were promoting legalism.

**John Piper** - In verse 21 Paul simply says that those who are turning back to the law of Moses as a job description for how to earn the wages of blessing from God should listen to what the law says. Note this well, lest anything I or Paul have said sounds anti-Semitic. Paul only wants to teach things that are implied in the Jewish Bible. His problem with the Judaizers is not that they are Jewish, but that they aren't Jewish enough. Paul himself was a Jew and never surrendered his allegiance to the law. What does it teach about freedom? ([Hagar and Slavery versus Sarah and Freedom](#))

**You who want to be under law** ("under the control of," "to be subject to") - Who is you? It is the Judaizers and it is the Galatian believers who have been bewitched. **Under** is the preposition **hupo** which in this context conveys the sense of being under the power, dominion or mastery of the law. The way Paul phrases the question signifies that the Galatians had not yet submitted to placing themselves under the Law of Moses but they were entertaining that desire. The Law can only put them under bondage.

**Robertson** - Paul views them as on the point of surrender to legalism, as "wanting" (thelontes) to do it (Galatians 1:6; Galatians 3:3; Galatians 4:11, 17). Paul makes direct reference to these so disposed to "hear the law." ([Galatians 4 - Robertson's Word Pictures in the New Testament](#))

**You who want** ([present tense](#) = continually)(2309)([thelo](#)) primarily means the Judaizers and the Galatian believers were exercising their will ([active voice](#) = they were making a conscious choice to do this) with the underlying sense that they were willing, desiring or wanting to place themselves **under the law**. Apparently this is what their conduct (he must have had first hand reports) suggests to him their desire to consider going under the law. **Wuest** adds "The words "ye that desire to be under the law, imply that the Galatians had not adopted, but were on the point of adopting the law. The idea is, "ye who are bent on being under law.""

**Jamieson, Fausset & Brown** on **you who want** – of your own accord madly courting that which must condemn and ruin you.

**David Guzik** addresses the question of why would anyone want to be **under the law**? - There are many "advantages" to being under the law as your principle of relating to God. First, **YOU** always have the outward certainty of a list of rules to keep. Second, **YOU** can compliment yourself because you keep the rules better than others do. Finally, **YOU** can take the credit for your own salvation, because you earned it by keeping the list of rules.

- **Under the law** it is what you do for God that makes you right before Him (ED: WHICH OF COURSE IT NEVER WILL!).
- **Under the grace of God**, it is what God has done for us in Jesus Christ that makes us right before Him.
- **Under the law** the focus is on my performance.
- **Under the grace of God**, the focus is on Who Jesus is and what He has done.
- **Under the law** we find fig leaves to cover our nakedness.
- **Under the grace of God** we receive the covering won through sacrifice that God provides. ([Enduring Word Bible Commentary – Galatians](#))

**ED:** Notice in Guzik's explanation above the repetition of the pronoun "**YOU**"! This is nothing but our old

flesh nature rising up to take control. In fact, if you want to stimulate your old flesh nature, just put yourself under a set of rules! E.g., Paul says "the sinful passions...were aroused by the Law" [Ro 7:5+, cf Ro 7:7-9]

**Spurgeon** asks "What is God's law now? It is not above a Christian – it is under a Christian. Some men hold God's law like a **rod in terrorem** (by way of threat or intimidation), over Christians, and say, 'If you sin you will be punished with it.' It is not so. The law is under a Christian; it is for him to walk on, to be his guide, his rule, his pattern . . . Law is the **road** which **guides** us, not the **rod** which **drives** us, nor the **spirit** which **actuates** us." ([The Allegories of Sarah and Hagar - Galatians 4:24](#))

**John MacArthur** - The term **law** frequently referred to the whole of the Old Testament (see, e.g., Rom. 3:19), but here it refers particularly to the Pentateuch, the five books of Moses. The point Paul makes by drawing an analogy from Moses' writing is that the law cannot be a means of salvation but is instead the way of spiritual and moral bondage. As an introduction to the analogy, Paul suggests that the Judaizers, and the Jewish Christians who had been misled by them, look carefully at the very law they so highly touted. Tell me, he asks, you who want to be under law, do you not listen to the law? "Since you insist on living under law," he was saying, "are you willing to listen to what the law really says?" (See context in [The MacArthur New Testament Commentary](#))

**Couch** - The Judaizers emphasized their relationship as Jews to God, based on their descent from Abraham, and made obeying the law appealing by providing rules and regulations for godly living and pleasing God. As a result the Galatian believers did not know the true message of the Law, which Paul now explains with an analogy based on historical facts. But he challenges them as if they did know something of the legal requirements in this system. When he asked if they had listened to the Law, he meant by this, "Did they fully grasp the heavy burden of trying to keep it?" Why did they think they could keep it when others could not? (Twenty-First Century Biblical Commentary Series – The Books of Galatians & Ephesians: By Grace through Faith)

**Don Anderson** - You folks that are there, don't you realize the Law is a total unit and you can't pick and choose what parts of it you're going to keep? And if you break any part of it, you've broken it all. James 2:10 Whosoever shall keep the whole law and yet offend in one point, he's guilty of it all. God doesn't grade on the curve. And so he starts right out with this: "Tell me, you who are desiring to be under law, are you not hearing the law?" Don't you understand the Law and the consequences of breaking it? I think with the word "law", he's referring to all 5 books: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy—the Pentateuch. Sometimes he uses the word "law" to refer to all of it because it spells out all the 618 different regulations and laws that are a part of it. So he's saying, let me give you an illustration of the consequences, of going back as a Christian to live under legalism. ([Notes Study 9](#))

**Do you not listen to the law?** - A touch of irony for sure. Also possibly an element of sarcasm. **NLT** = "Do you know what the law actually says"; **GWN** = "Are you really listening to what Moses' Teachings say?") Paul personifies the **'law'** as a speaker, in sense even a "witness" to defend his argument for the superiority of grace over Law. He will use the familiar story from Genesis to illustrate this question. The verb for **listen** (akouo) in this context refers to the process of understanding something. Paul is in essence challenging the Galatians with this question asking them if they truly grasp what the Law said and what were the implications of being under the Law?

**Ridderbos** says "the Torah contains much besides stipulated commands. And whoever reads the whole of the Torah will discover that its bearing is quite different from the one the Galatians are apparently at present inclined to believe." ([The Epistle of Paul to the Churches of Galatia](#))

And what had Paul said about the Law in Galatians 3:13?

Christ redeemed us from **the curse of the Law**, having become a curse for us—for it is written, "CURSED IS EVERYONE WHO HANGS ON A TREE"—

This passage in essence says that if they are attempting to live their life under the law, they are under the curse. Why? Because of Paul's quotation of Moses in chapter 3

For as many as are of the works of the Law are under a curse; for it is written, **CURSED IS EVERYONE WHO DOES NOT ABIDE BY ALL THINGS WRITTEN IN THE BOOK OF THE LAW, TO PERFORM THEM.**" (quoting the Septuagint of Dt 27:26) 11 Now that no one is justified by the Law before God is evident; for, "THE RIGHTEOUS MAN SHALL LIVE BY FAITH." 12 However, the Law is not of faith; on the contrary, **HE WHO PRACTICES THEM SHALL LIVE BY THEM.**" (Gal 3:10-12)

In other words, Paul says "Okay if you want to go back under the Law, help yourself! But you need to realize that you are placing yourself in an impossible situation because you cannot keep the law perfectly (cf Gal 3:10 "abide by **ALL** things..."). Can you see what Paul is doing by asking this question? If you go back under the law, you will have to obey it perfectly or you will be cursed. So you can understand why Paul was **perplexed** in Gal 4:20! And remember do not confuse this with the moral law of God which will never go away and we obey it out of love and enabled by the indwelling Spirit. We are talking about the external law which identified

Israel as the unique people of God, including feast days, new moons, etc, for they were all shadows fulfilled in Christ (Read Col 2:16-17+).

**Guzik** - Essentially, Paul said **“Let’s have a Bible study. Open your Bibles to Genesis chapter 16”** Paul took it for granted that his readers knew the Bible. He explains his point from the story of Abraham, Hagar, and Sarah in Genesis 16 without a lot of detail from the story. He assumes that they knew the story. It is important that Paul refer back to the Scriptures again and again. The legalists among the Galatians presented themselves as the “back to the Bible” bunch. Yet Paul will show that they were not handling the Old Testament Scriptures correctly, and he will show that a true understanding of the Law of Moses will support the true gospel he preaches. ([Enduring Word Bible Commentary – Galatians](#))

**Swindoll** - Paul asks, "Okay, you Judaizers and all you Galatians who are listening to them, pay attention! You think that living by the Law is the way to go? Great! Then listen to what the Law itself says!" For the sake of argument, Paul grants his opponents' premise—that we are obligated to follow everything the Law says. Then he turns this premise against them. To put it bluntly, Paul is preparing to rub their noses in it....So, here in Galatians 4:21-31, Paul engages in a method of argument rarely seen in the New Testament, but which would have been quite familiar to his audience: allegorical interpretation of Scripture. (See context [Insights on Galatians, Ephesians](#))

**C S Lewis** defined allegorical interpretation as "searching for a hidden or a secret meaning underlying but remote from and unrelated in reality to the more obvious meaning of a text."

**Bickel & Jantz** say: Before he gives a quick summary of the story, Paul asks the Galatians (who want to live under the law) a sarcastic question: “Do you know what the law actually says?” (4:21). It would be like someone telling you, “I want to live under a dictatorship,” to which you would reply, “Do you know what a dictatorship really is?” (p. 106)

**H A Ironside** says: “TELL me, ye that desire to be under the law, do ye not hear the law?” We have already noticed that while the Galatians were a Gentile people who had been saved by grace, they had fallen under the influence of certain Judaizing teachers who were trying to put them under the law. They said, “Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved” (Acts 15:1), and so in this letter the apostle Paul has taken up the great question of Law and Grace and has been expounding it, clarifying it, making clear that salvation is not by works of the law but entirely by the hearing of faith. ([Galatians 4 - Ironside's Notes](#))

**J Vernon McGee** - There are people who talk about the Ten Commandments or some legal system, but they don’t talk about the penalty imposed by the Law. They don’t present the Law in the full orb of its ministry of condemnation. Notice what happened when God called Moses to the mountain to give the Law: “And it came to pass on the third day in the morning, that there were thunders and lightnings, and a thick cloud upon the mount, and the voice of the trumpet exceeding loud; so that all the people that was in the camp trembled. (Quoted in [A Practical Study of GALATIANS](#))

**Spurgeon Morning and Evening** of the Vanity of the Law, etc - Why then do we calculate our forces, and consult with flesh and blood to our grievous wounding? Jehovah has power enough without borrowing from our puny arm. Peace, ye unbelieving thoughts, be still, and know that the Lord reigneth. Nor is there a hint concerning secondary means and causes. The Lord says nothing of friends and helpers: He undertakes the work alone, and feels no need of human arms to aid Him. Vain are all our lookings around to companions and relatives; they are broken reeds if we lean upon them—often unwilling when able, and unable when they are willing. Since the promise comes alone from God, it would be well to wait only upon Him; and when we do so, our expectation never fails us.

**Galatians 4:22 For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by the bondwoman and one by the free woman.**

KJV Galatians 4:22 For it is written, that Abraham had two sons, the one by a bondmaid, the other by a freewoman.

- **it is written that Abraham had two sons** Genesis 16:2-4,15; 21:1,2,10
- Galatians 4 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries
- Galatians 4:21-5:1 - Don Anderson [Galatians Study 9](#); [More Notes on Galatians Study 9](#)
- [Warren Wiersbe's sermon Born Free - Galatians 4](#) - one of the simplest and most profound expositions you will ever hear on Galatians 4!

The appeal from the two contrasted covenants (Galatians 4:21-31)

- i. The question to those desiring to be under law (Galatians 4:21)



- ii. The story of Abraham's two sons (Galatians 4:22-23)
- iii. The allegorical interpretation of the story (Galatians 4:24-30)

## ABRAHAM'S TWO SONS

The Apostle Paul goes into an incident in the Old Testament concerning Ishmael and Isaac to show that law and grace are incompatible and cannot co-exist.

**Constable** - Paul interpreted **allegorically** (figuratively, NIV) features of the history of Abraham's two sons to convince his readers that they were **in danger of joining the wrong branch of Abraham's family**. The apostle appears to have used the story of Abraham the way he did because this was a common rabbinic method that the Judaizers probably employed in their teaching in Galatia. ([Galatians 4](#))

And notice the fact that Paul just jumps into the story of Abraham with no other explanation or background, indicates that he assumed the Gentile believers in Galatia knew what he was talking about. It implies that when he was with them, he had taught them out of the Old Testament. And so Abraham, Sarah, Hagar, Isaac and Ishmael would have been familiar to them. Of course this also makes sense, because at this time in the early church history the only Bible Paul had from which to preach to the Gentiles was the Old Testament. Recall that when he spoke about justification by faith, he drew his support from the Old Testament (Gal 3:6-9+).

**For (gar)** is a term of explanation - Wuest explains "The word **for** connects the contents of verse 21 with those of 22. The idea is, "Your desire to be under law is not in harmony with Scripture, and here is the scripture."

**For it is written (grapho)** - The phrase **it is written** describes ([perfect tense](#) = it stands written) Scripture quoted or referred to as authoritative (e.g., Mt. 4:4; Mk 7:6; Lk 4:8, 10; Ro 1:17; 1 Cor. 1:19, 31). Paul after "setting them up" by asking "**do you not listen to the law**" now says "Okay here is what the law says."

Note that Paul returns to the Old Testament record THREE TIMES in this passage: Gal 4:22—"IT HAS BEEN WRITTEN THAT ABRAHAM HAD TWO SONS," 2. Gal 4:27—"FOR IT HAS BEEN WRITTEN"—he is quoting from Isaiah 54:1, and 3. Gal 4:30—"BUT WHAT IS THE SCRIPTURE SAYING? THROW OUT THE MAIDSERVANT AND HER SON"—here Paul is quoting from Genesis 21:8-10.

**Written** (1125) ([grapho](#) from root **graph-** = primarily means to scratch on or engrave) means to engrave or inscribe with a stylus characters or letters on a surface which can be wood, wax, metal, leather, stone, parchment, dirt (John ), paper, etc. **It is written** occurs 76 times in the **NAS**. When we were children and our parents told us to do something and we questioned "Why?", the answer was usually "Because I said so!". Why are we commanded to be holy? Because God said so! A popular saying is "God said it, I believe it, that settles it." This sounds good but isn't accurate because God's Word is true, regardless of whether we believe it or not. A more accurate "saying" would be "God said it, that settles it!" **It is written** should put a stop to every complaint or excuse. This sobering thought should motivate his readers (and us) to heed his injunction.

**Donald Campbell** - By turning again to Abraham (Genesis., as one of the Books of Moses, was considered a part of the Law) Paul was appealing to the founder of the Jewish nation from whose physical descent the Jews traced their blessings. John the Baptist and Jesus declared that physical descent from Abraham was not enough, however, to guarantee spiritual blessing (cf. Matt. 3:9; John 8:37-44). (BKC)

**Don Anderson** - In this passage, we are going to note together that there are: TWO WOMEN, TWO SONS, TWO COVENANTS, TWO MOUNTAINS, and TWO CITIES. There is: the LAW as OPPOSED to the PROMISE and the FLESH as OPPOSED to the SPIRIT. The application of the whole illustration will be: BONDAGE UNDER THE LAW or FREEDOM IN JESUS CHRIST. Paul has already used Abraham and his faith several times in the previous chapters and now he returns to his BIOGRAPHY once again to drive home his point: Genesis 15—God made a covenant with Abraham that his seed would be as the stars of heaven. Genesis 16—Sarah did not have any children so they grew quite impatient with God. Sarah told Abraham to go in unto her maid. Sarah's thought after TEN YEARS OF DELAY was that obviously God means for us to HELP instead of WAIT. **When you are most eager to act is when you will make the most pitiful mistakes. WAITING INVOLVES DEPENDENCE.** (Ps 27:14 **Wait** for the LORD; Be strong and let your heart take courage; Yes, **wait** for the LORD.) ([Notes](#))

A poem recorded in Streams in the Desert by L. B. Cowman

Waiting, yes, patiently waiting,  
Till next steps made plain shall be  
To hear with the inner hearing,



The voice that will call for me.

Waiting, yes, hopefully waiting,  
With hope that need not grow dim,  
The Master has pledged to guide me  
And my eyes are unto Him.

Waiting, expectantly waiting,  
Perhaps it may be today,  
The Master will quickly open  
The gate to my future way.

Waiting, yes, waiting, still waiting.  
I know, though, I have waited long  
That while He withholds His purpose,  
His waiting cannot be wrong.

Waiting, yes, waiting, still waiting,  
The Master will not be late.  
He knoweth that I am waiting  
For Him to unlatch the gate.  
—Jay Danson Smith

**Wiersbe** - Paul began with the two sons, Ishmael and Isaac (Gal. 4:22-23), and explained that they illustrate our two births: the physical birth that makes us sinners and the spiritual birth that makes us the children of God. (See context in [Be Free Galatians: Exchange Legalism for True Spirituality](#) or borrow [Be Free: An Expository Study of Galatians](#))

**That Abraham had two sons** - Paul is going to use these two sons, Ishmael and Isaac to illustrate the difference between law and grace. The Judaizers of course boasted in having "Father Abraham" as their genetic father. It was in their racial descent from him that most Jews of Paul's day placed their trust for salvation. As Jews they were indeed children of Abraham and they flaunted this as making them the unique people of God. They felt that if you wanted to be part of the people of God you had to do as they did and specifically had to adhere to the Law of Moses. Paul had refuted this false belief in Gal 3:7 writing "Therefore, be sure that it is those who are of faith who are sons of Abraham." The requirement for being a child of Abraham (a spiritual child) was only one thing, faith, not genetic descent! In Gal 3:14 Paul added that "in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles so that we would receive the promise of the Spirit through faith." And in Gal 3:29 he said "And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's descendants, heirs according to promise." So the Galatian Gentiles might not be Jews, but they could still be Abraham's descendants.

**THOUGHT ON "FATHER ABRAHAM"** - [Ray Pritchard](#) points out that "If you could find Abraham back there somewhere, you were in God's family. Paul is saying, "Not so!" God's family is made up of those who have a relationship with him by faith in Jesus Christ. It's a matter of faith, not your family tree. This is a crucial point to consider because millions of people today think that being right with God is merely a matter of spiritual pedigree. They say things like, "I'm Catholic so I must be okay." Or "I was baptized Presbyterian so I know I'm going to heaven." Or "My father was a Baptist minister and that puts me in good with God." Or they trust in their Lutheran heritage or their Episcopal connections or their Methodist church membership or their Charismatic leanings. Joe Moakley, the recently-deceased Democratic Congressman from Massachusetts, liked to joke that when a child is born into an Irish family in Boston, three things automatically happen. He is baptized into the Catholic Church, registered with the Democratic Party, and given a union card. Down South where I come from almost everyone was Baptist, and many folks trusted in their baptism by a Baptist pastor as their assurance of eternal life. Others think that because they are the children of a missionary or of a pastor, they must be in good standing with God. But it is not true. You don't go to heaven because you get credit for what your mother or father believed. That may help you on earth; it won't make a dime's worth of difference in eternity. The problem in Galatia was this: The Judaizers taught that you either had to be a Jew or you had to act like a Jew in order to be saved. That meant being circumcised and keeping the outward trappings of the Law of Moses. The Judaizers said, "**Who's your father?**" Paul said, "I've got another question. **Who's your mother?**"

In Matthew John the Baptist said to the Jews coming to him for baptism "Therefore bear fruit in keeping with repentance; and do not

suppose that you can say to yourselves, 'We have **Abraham** for our father'; for I say to you that from these stones God is able to raise up children to Abraham."

In John 8 we read...

They answered and said to Him, "**Abraham is our father.**" Jesus \*said to them, "**if you are Abraham's children, do the deeds of Abraham.** 40 "But as it is, you are seeking to kill Me, a man who has told you the truth, which I heard from God; this **Abraham** did not do. 41 "You are doing the deeds of your father." They said to Him, "We were not born of fornication; we have one Father: God." 42 Jesus said to them, "If God were your Father, you would love Me, for I proceeded forth and have come from God, for I have not even come on My own initiative, but He sent Me. 43 "Why do you not understand what I am saying? It is because you cannot hear My word. 44 "**You are of your father the devil,** and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies. (John 8:39-44)

**Barton** - While the Judaizers focused on the minute aspects of law keeping described in Leviticus and Deuteronomy, Paul turned to another part of the Law, the historical account of Abraham, father of the Jewish nation (see also 3:6-29), to illustrate his point. The Judaizers, indeed all Jews, took great pride in their descent from godly Abraham. However, as John the Baptist and Jesus pointed out, merely being descended from Abraham was not enough to secure salvation (see Matthew 3:9; John 8:37-44). Paul made the same point in this section, though from a slightly different angle. ([Galatians](#))

**One by the bondwoman** - Refers to the Egyptian maid Hagar who bore Abraham his first son Ishmael.

**Barton** - In ancient times, a mother's status affected the status of her children. Paul reminded his readers that Abraham had two types of sons—one born of a *slave woman* and one born of a *free woman*. Paul wanted the Galatians to consider which type of descendant these Judaizers were more like and then decide which they themselves desired to be like. (See [Life Application New Testament Commentary](#))

**Bondwoman** (3814)(**paidiske** diminutive of **pais** = a girl, youth) refers to a young girl or maiden. In NT refers to a slave girl or female slave. This very word is used 6 times (see uses below) in the Septuagint translation of Genesis 16 to refer to Hagar.

**Gilbrant** - In classical Greek **paidiskē** is a flexible term. It often denotes a "female slave" or "servant girl." In addition, it is also used to refer to a prostitute. However, it can mean "young girl" with no reference to social position (Liddell-Scott). In later periods paidiskē refers only to female slaves or servants (Bauer). An example is found in a papyrus from the Third Century A.D. containing a letter from a man to his sister. He encourages her to "make my slave-girl (paidiskē) be properly industrious" (Moulton-Milligan). The Septuagint uses paidiskē, with rare exception (e.g., Ruth 4:12 uses na'ārāh "girl"), to translate two Hebrew words shiphcāh and 'āmāh. Both terms refer to a female slave or servant. These terms often carry the added meaning of concubine or mistress. In the New Testament paidiskē always refers to a female slave or servant. The female slave can be a concubine. Galatians 4:22, for example, refers to Abraham having two sons, "one by the slave woman" (NIV; "bondmaid," KJV [paidiskē]). However, paidiskē may also refer simply to a servant girl with no sexual relationship implied. In John 18:17 a servant girl accused Peter of being a disciple of Jesus. ([Complete Biblical Library Greek-English Dictionary](#))

**Paidiske** - 12 x - bondwoman(5), servant-girl(4), servant-girls(1), slave-girl(2), slaves\*(1), women(1).

Matt. 26:69; Mk. 14:66; Mk. 14:69; Lk. 12:45; Lk. 22:56; Jn. 18:17; Acts 12:13; Acts 16:16; Gal. 4:22; Gal. 4:23; Gal. 4:30; Gal. 4:31

**Paidiske** in the Septuagint -

Gen. 12:16; Gen. 16:1; Gen. 16:2; Gen. 16:3; Gen. 16:5; Gen. 16:6; Gen. 16:8; Gen. 20:14; Gen. 20:17; Gen. 21:10; Gen. 21:12; Gen. 21:13; Gen. 24:35; Gen. 25:12; Gen. 29:24; Gen. 29:29; Gen. 30:3; Gen. 30:4; Gen. 30:5; Gen. 30:7; Gen. 30:9; Gen. 30:10; Gen. 30:12; Gen. 30:18; Gen. 30:43; Gen. 31:33; Gen. 32:5; Gen. 32:22; Gen. 33:1; Gen. 33:2; Gen. 33:6; Gen. 34:4; Gen. 35:25; Gen. 35:26; Exod. 20:10; Exod. 20:17; Exod. 21:20; Exod. 21:32; Exod. 23:12; Lev. 25:6; Lev. 25:44; Deut. 5:14; Deut. 5:21; Deut. 12:12; Deut. 12:18; Deut. 15:17; Deut. 16:11; Deut. 16:14; Deut. 28:68; Jdg. 9:18; Jdg. 19:19; Ruth 2:13; Ruth 4:12; 1 Sam. 25:41; 2 Sam. 6:20; 2 Sam. 6:22; 2 Sam. 17:17; 2 Ki. 5:26; Ezr. 2:65; Neh. 7:67; Est. 7:4; Ps. 86:16; Ps. 116:16; Ps. 123:2; Eccl. 2:7; Jer. 34:9; Jer. 34:10; Jer. 34:11; Jer. 34:16; Amos 2:7;

**And one by the free woman** - Sarah, Abraham's wife.

**Free** (unbound, unshackled)(1658) see use of **eleutheros** (See also **eleutheroo**) - Note Paul's emphasis on freedom using this word 5 times in his argument in Gal 4:21-31 (5 of 23 NT uses - Gal 4:22, 23, 26, 30, 31).

**MacArthur** - Throughout the analogy, all distinctions between the two sons are based on the fact that they had two different mothers, not on the fact that they had a common father, Abraham. The heritage of the line through one mother is lostness and bondage, and the heritage of the line through the other mother is salvation and freedom. (See context [The MacArthur New Testament Commentary](#).)

**Calvin** says: No man who has a choice given him will be so mad as to despise freedom, and prefer slavery. But here the apostle teaches us, that they who are under the law are slaves. Unhappy men! who willingly choose this condition, when God desires to make them free.

**Lange** says: I must inquire: do ye not hear the Law; for if you really heard the law, you would find in it that which might convince you how unsound and dangerous it is to “desire to be under the law.” ([Galatians 4 Lange Commentary](#))

**Don Anderson** - Now, do you remember what happened? God made that promise to them. God alone walked between the pieces and said that you're going to have a land and you're going to have a seed, you're going to be the father of many nations. When that promise was made, they handled that delay of that promise for 10 years. Then Sarah woke up one morning saying “You know, we've got to understand I'm not getting any younger. And I think God really means for us to help Him in this. And the way we're going to do that, Abe, is that you're going to go in under the handmaid Hagar. She's an Egyptian handmaid and she's going to give birth to the child and that's going to be the covenant child.” And so Abraham goes along with it. They didn't bring the Lord into it. They simply assumed that God appreciates help. And so, Ishmael was born. Do you remember what happened when Ishmael was born? God pulls the curtain. For 13 years there's not one thing that's recorded in the scripture. It tells you when you do something in the flesh, you're out of fellowship. And the Spirit of God is not in control. And for those 13 years, it's just like one place he's 88 years old and the next place he's 100. It's just that there's a gap there between those two chapters, chapters 16 and 17....Do you remember what the Lord said in Genesis 17 to Abram when Abram said, “You know, I'm so thankful that Ishmael is going to be the one.” The Lord said “No. Sarah is going to bear you a son.” What a horrible, horrible feeling to realize that for 13 years I've been assuming that what I did in the flesh was appreciated by the Lord and therefore I ought to be entering into the blessing. How many people...are assuming that because of their good works, their church membership, the things they have done, that in their old age they can be very comfortable that when they get to glory they're going to roll out the red carpet and everything is going to be fine. ([Notes Study 9](#))

**Galatians 4:23 But the son by the bondwoman was born according to the flesh, and the son by the free woman through the promise.**

KJV Galatians 4:23 But he who was of the bondwoman was born after the flesh; but he of the freewoman was by promise.

NIV His son by the slave woman was born in the ordinary way (ED: BUT NOT IN A RIGHTEOUS WAY); but his son by the free woman was born as the result of a promise.

NET But one, the son by the slave woman, was born by natural descent, while the other, the son by the free woman, was born through the promise.

- **born** Romans 9:7,8
- **and the son by the free woman** Genesis 17:15-19; 18:10-14; 21:1,2; Romans 4:18-21; 10:8; Hebrews 11:11
- Galatians 4 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries
- Galatians 4:21-5:1 - Don Anderson [Galatians Study 9; More Notes on Galatians Study 9](#)
- [Warren Wiersbe's sermon Born Free - Galatians 4](#) - one of the simplest and most profound expositions you will ever hear on Galatians 4!

The appeal from the two contrasted covenants (Galatians 4:21-31)

- i. The question to those desiring to be under law (Galatians 4:21)
- ii. The story of Abraham's two sons (Galatians 4:22-23)
- iii. The allegorical interpretation of the story (Galatians 4:24-30)

## **THE WAY OF THE FLESH VS WAY OF THE PROMISE**

Ishmael was the human solution to the covenant and his birth was of works and not of grace or faith.

**But the son by the bondwoman was born according to the flesh**- NIV says in the ordinary way, NET the natural way, and so in the course of nature and requiring no miracle, no promise of God, no dependence on God, no trust in God. **According to the flesh** = the product of self-reliance, not Spirit reliance. In short Abraham and Sarah [colluded](#) and ceased to rely on God's power to fulfill His promise and instead relied on their own power and human ingenuity to get a son in their futile attempt to fulfill God's promise. The flesh can never lay hold of the promises of God. Only faith can firmly grasp God's promises. As you read this, is there some "Ishmael-like" scheme in your mind or in your practice by which you are attempting to secure some of the promises of God?

**Anderson** - "THE FLESH" is that old capacity to do it ourselves. It is that which produces SELF-RIGHTEOUSNESS. One of the things that we can learn about "THE FLESH" is its desire to run ahead of God and do things on its own. (Ibid)

**F. B. Meyer** said it well: **The flesh loves excitement.** (ED: SADLY WE CAN ALL IDENTIFY WITH MEYER'S STATEMENT?) It is always ready to jump up and run somewhere. The Holy Spirit does not. Someone has said Satan rushes men, but God leads them. Never act in panic nor allow man to dictate to you; calm yourself and be still; force yourself into the quiet of your closet until the pulse beats normally and the "scare" has ceased to disturb. When you are most eager to act is the time when you will make the most pitiable mistakes. Do not say in your heart what you will or will not do, but wait upon God until He makes known His way. So long as that way is hidden, it is clear that there is no need of action. (Our Daily Bread, H.G.B., Tuesday, Jan. 12)

Ishmael born to Hagar illustrates the flesh motivated by purely selfish desires and fulfilled by purely human means. In other words, Ishmael's birth was "engineered" by Abraham and Sarah in a vain attempt to make God's promise come true, but it was by their own plans and efforts, rather than waiting on and trusting in God's timing. The promise had been made very clear to both of them that God would give a son, but here we see their flesh in essence rejects (or at least refuses to believe) the promise of God and tries to fulfill in its own power what only God can give.

**THE CHRONOLOGY OF EVENTS HELPS UNDERSTAND THIS STORY** - The flesh of Abraham and Hagar were not willing to wait on God's fulfillment of the promise -

- **At age 75** God told Abraham to go to Canaan and promised him many descendants (Ge 12:1-9).
- **At age 85** the promised son had not yet arrived and Sarah becoming impatient suggests that Abraham go into to her maid and father a child (**born according to the flesh**), trying to fulfill God's supernatural promise but fleshly means (Ge 16:1-3).
- **At age 86** Abraham gets Hagar pregnant and Sarah gets jealous of the son Ishmael! (Ge 16:4-16). Years pass and at age 99 God promises Abraham (and Sarah - Ge 18:9-15) a son and tells him to name him Isaac. (Ge 17-18, Read Ge 17:16-19 verse 19 stating "God said, "No, but Sarah your wife will bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac; and I will establish My covenant with him for an everlasting covenant for his descendants after him")
- At age 100 Isaac is born (Ge 21:1-7).
- But then **at age 103** when Isaac was to be weaned, Ishmael mocked Isaac, so that Hagar and Ishmael had to be cast out (Ge 21:8-14).

As a historical aside, the two sons had not only spiritual significance as explained by Paul but would end up producing political significance as the family animosity between Abraham's two sons gave rise to the [Arab-Israeli conflict](#) which has gone on for 4000 years and will continue to be a major hotspot until Jesus returns!

**Wiersbe** on the two sons - Paul begins with the two sons, Ishmael and Isaac (Gal. 4:22–23), and explains that they illustrate our two births: the physical birth that makes us sinners and the spiritual birth that makes us the children of God. (See context in [Be Free Galatians: Exchange Legalism for True Spirituality](#) or borrow [Be Free: An Expository Study of Galatians](#))

**Bruce Barton** - By using this illustration (OF TWO SONS), Paul was setting up the distinction between *ordinary, man-made religion* and *supernatural, miraculous, God-made religion*. (AND IN SO DOING HE ALSO) directly challenged the assumptions of the Judaizers **that they were representatives of the Abrahamic promise**. Paul would explain that what happened to Sarah and Hagar pictures the relationship between God and mankind. Though perhaps difficult for us to follow, this was a common type of argument in Paul's day; the same type of argument had probably been used against him by his opponents. As he so often did so well, Paul returned fire on his opponents with their own weapons. (see context in [Galatians Life Application Bible Commentary](#))(Bold added)

## **ALL GOD'S DOING THOUGH THE PROMISE**

**Anderson** - Because the birth of Isaac was based on the UNCONDITIONAL PROMISE, nothing could change that, not even a premature act of the flesh 15 years earlier in the birth of Ishmael by the way of the Egyptian maid, Hagar. ([A Practical Study of](#)

[GALATIANS: You Were Running Well](#))

**And the son by the free woman through the promise-** The **free woman** is Sarah and **the son** is Isaac, the one God had promised He would give. But Sarah is 90 and Abraham is 100 so she is beyond child bearing age. And so God gives her the promised child supernaturally (miraculously) (see Heb 11:11). Isaac was born son of Sarah under impossible circumstances, while Ishmael was the naturally born son.

So Paul uses these two births to illustrate the spiritual truth that Ishmael was born not only in the natural way, but actually in a sinful way (God had always intended Abraham to have only one wife). Thus Ishmael is a picture of men trying to fulfill the will of God in their sinful, fleshly power. Ishmael represents all those who try to do it in their own natural (fleshly) power. Ishmael is an illustration of all those who seek to be saved by their own works. Not only that but Ishmael was born to a slave woman and was himself a slave who gave rise to an entire line of slaves. In sum, Ishmael symbolizes all those who attempt to accomplish God's will by the power of their flesh and who end up in bondage. Isaac is the son who was born as a result of Abraham's faith and was born a free man.

**Free** (unbound, unshackled)(1658) see use of **eleutheros** (See also **eleutheroo**) - Note Paul's emphasis on freedom using this word 5 times in his argument in Gal 4:21-31 (5 of 23 NT uses - Gal 4:22, 23, 26, 30, 31).

The following table summarizes the contrasts in Paul's argument in Galatians 4:21-27

HAGAR	SARAH
Slave	Free
Ishmael	Isaac
Son of bondwoman	Son of free woman
Born into slavery	Born as a free man
The way of the flesh	The way of promise
Born because of work, effort	Born by promise of God
The natural, fleshly way	The miraculous way
Way of religious self-effort	Way of faith
Works righteousness	Imputed righteousness
Way of legalism	Way of grace
Symbolic of only natural birth	Symbolic of spiritual birth
Trust in their own works	Trust in work of Jesus
Representative of the Covenant of the Law (Mosaic Covenant)	Representative of the Covenant of Grace (Abraham > New Covenant)
Present Jerusalem	Jerusalem Above
Represents Legalism	Represents Life in the Spirit
Leads to Slavery	Leads to Freedom
Eternal Death	Eternal Life

God miraculously enabled both Abraham and Sarah to conceive (a "miracle baby"! ). God did so to fulfill His promise to Abraham "I will surely return to you at this time next year; and behold, Sarah your wife will have a son." And Sarah was listening at the tent door, which was behind him. Now Abraham and Sarah were old, advanced in age; Sarah was past childbearing." (Ge 18:10-11)

The writer of Hebrews has a parallel passage....

**By faith** even Sarah herself received **ability** (**dunamis** - often translated miracle - this is in essence a miracle!) to conceive, even beyond the proper time of life, since she considered Him faithful who had promised; therefore, also, there was born of one man, and **him as good as dead at that**, as many descendants AS THE STARS OF HEAVEN IN NUMBER, AND INNUMERABLE AS THE SAND WHICH IS BY THE SEASHORE. (Hebrews 11:11-12)

And so Isaac was born as a result of Abraham's faith in God, for God miraculously enabled Abraham who was **"as good as dead"** in terms of childbearing capacity to father a child with his wife Sarah, who **"was beyond the proper time of life"** to conceive. In short, Isaac's conception and birth was supernatural. Because they believed the promise of God, they saw the power of God. And just as Ishmael's birth is a picture of works based salvation, Isaac's birth is a picture of salvation by faith alone. Abraham believed God and God supernaturally fulfilled His will in Abraham.

**John MacArthur** sums it up - Ishmael pictures all those who try to please God and accomplish God's will by the flesh. It's sinful, it's useless, it creates bondage. Isaac symbolizes all those who do the will of God by faith in His promise. He does the work; He brings it to pass; He receives the glory. "Why would you," – Paul is saying – "why would you who are the children of promise, why would you think to accomplish the purposes of God through the flesh?" ([A Perfect Portrait of Saving Faith, Part 1](#))

**John Piper** comments that " Abraham had learned his lesson: the only acceptable response to God's merciful promise *itrust* in that promise, *not works* of the flesh that try to bring down God's blessing with our efforts." ([Sermon](#))

**Galatians 4:24 This is allegorically speaking, for these women are two covenants: one proceeding from Mount Sinai bearing children who are to be slaves; she is Hagar.**

KJV Galatians 4:24 Which things are an allegory: for these are the two covenants; the one from the mount Sinai, which gendereth to bondage, which is Agar.

- **This is allegorically speaking** Ezekiel 20:49; Hosea 11:10; Matthew 13:35; 1 Corinthians 10:11; Hebrews 11:19
- **for these women** 25; Luke 22:19,20; 1 Corinthians 10:4
- **are two covenants** Galatians 3:15-21; Hebrews 7:22; 8:6-13; 9:15-24; 10:15-18; 12:24; 13:20
- **covenants** . Galatians 5:1; Romans 8:15
- **Hagar** Genesis 16:3,4,8,15,16; 21:9-13; 25:12
- Galatians 4 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries
- Galatians 4:21-5:1 - Don Anderson [Galatians Study 9; More Notes on Galatians Study 9](#)
- [Warren Wiersbe's sermon Born Free - Galatians 4](#) - one of the simplest and most profound expositions you will ever hear on Galatians 4!

The allegorical interpretation of the story (Galatians 4:24-30)

- a. The two mothers representing two covenants (Galatians 4:24a)
- b. The description of the two covenants (Galatians 4:24b-28)
  1. The one representing a covenant of bondage (Galatians 4:24b-25)
  2. The other representing a covenant of freedom (Galatians 4:26-28)
- c. The expulsion of the slave woman and her son (Galatians 4:29-30)

The conclusion from the story (Galatians 4:31)

## TWO MOTHERS REPRESENT TWO COVENANTS

**Don Anderson** gives us the background on two covenants. - You're going to have the Mosaic covenant and you're going to have the Abrahamic covenant. You understand, the Mosaic covenant is different from the Abrahamic covenant in this sense—the Mosaic covenant is conditional. It is two people—Moses and the Lord together— and it's conditional on obedience. The blessing of the Mosaic covenant is conditioned on obedience and fulfilling the 10 requirements for the Law. So there's no blessing if you break it. The Abrahamic covenant is different. Abrahamic covenant is unconditional. It is God alone walking between the pieces saying "I promise to do this." And there is no stipulation in that covenant. So he's going to play the Abrahamic covenant against the Mosaic covenant. That's going to be part of your study today. ([Study 9 Teacher Notes](#))

**This is allegorically speaking** - Note the phrase **this is** which refers to the two preceding passages Galatians 4:22-23. Paul inspired by the Spirit takes the literal story from Genesis and now uses it as a spiritual illustration.

As explained below **John MacArthur** sees this as an **illustration** not an **allegory** (see his [reasoning](#)). He writes that "Paul here specifically states that his present illustration is an analogy."

**McGee** - Paul is not saying that the story of Abraham is an allegory—some have interpreted this statement as meaning that—but Paul is saying that the incident of the two women who bore Abraham sons contains an allegory. It has a message for us today. (See context [Thru the Bible](#))

**Don Anderson** comments on **allegory** - Now I've got to talk to you about one more thing. We're going to see what is called an allegory. This is the only place in the Bible where you have the word "allegory." There are so many people who have gotten tripped



up by this word allegory that they think that's the only way to interpret the Bible. Everything is an allegory. You don't have to prove its historicity. You don't have to show what it's saying [literally](#). The only reason Paul uses a literal story—now get this in your mind, we're going to look at the record (it's literal, it happened for Abraham). Paul is going to take that literal happening and make an allegory out of it because the **Judaizing teachers believe that the highest interpretation of the Law was an allegory** So he's playing right into their court in what he has to say. Don't let that affect your feelings about the book of Revelation, about any other situation with regard to the scripture. The [literal interpretation](#) is always the safest and the only way to be. When you have a parable, when you have a symbolism, a picture where it says "like" you can still interpret it literally. Like I'm teaching the book of Revelation on Monday night. I've got the word "like, like, like." "Like the face of a man." "Like a calf." "Like an eagle." You take the [literal interpretation](#) of that passage and apply it to the passage. So I'm just saying that because there are a lot of people who will turn to this passage and say "Well, Paul used an allegory, why can't I use an allegory and allegorize the life of Christ? Or other things in the scripture?" **We can't.** ... Now, to the Jews—the Judaizers, these teachers—they had 4 levels of interpretation whenever they interpreted the Law. The first one would be the **LITERAL** and they didn't go there very often. The second would be the **SUGGESTED**—what do you think it means? The third would be **EVOLVED FROM INVESTIGATION**— you have really studied the Law, you've studied the language and this is the interpretation. And then if you reach the epitome, you would have an **ALLEGORICAL** interpretation. You would take the story to mean this and that. No sense of literal. Now, we're just the opposite aren't we? We come to the book knowing that it is verbally inerrant. It is a rule of faith and practice. It is authoritative. It is God's Word and when we open it, we take it literally. And if we don't understand it, we ask the Spirit of God to make it clear to us and we study and agonize over the text until it is clear what it is that is trying to be said in the passage. ([Study 9 Teacher Notes](#))

**John Piper** speaking of the events in Genesis adds "it is fully legitimate to use those stories from Genesis to symbolize and **illustrate** the later events." ([Hagar and Slavery Vs. Sarah and Freedom](#))

Below are several translations which render the Greek word as an **illustration** not as **allegorically speaking**...

**NLT** Galatians 4:24 These two women serve as an **illustration** of God's two covenants. The first woman, Hagar, represents Mount Sinai where people received the law that enslaved them.

**CSB** Galatians 4:24 These things are **illustrations**, for the women represent the two covenants. One is from Mount Sinai and bears children into slavery-- this is Hagar.

**GWN** Galatians 4:24 I'm going to use these historical events as an **illustration**. The women illustrate two arrangements. The one woman, Hagar, is the arrangement made on Mount Sinai. Her children are born into slavery.

**TLB** Galatians 4:24 Now this true story is an illustration of God's two ways of helping people...

**Jewish NT** ([David H. Stern](#)) Now, to make a midrash on these things: the two women are two covenants. One is from Mount Sinai and bears children for slavery — this is Hagar. Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia

**David Stern's Comment** - Greek allêgoroumena, "being allegorized." Hebrew midrash means "study, interpretation"; it derives from "lidrosh," "to search." Most of Jewish midrashic literature brings out ethical and devotional aspects of the Bible, sometimes drawing out and applying what is manifestly there, and sometimes imposing meanings on the texts, although the norm in Judaism is not to make a midrash that violates the p'shat (simple sense) of the text (see Mt 2:15N). Here Sha'ul goes beyond the p'shat of the Genesis texts, though without violating them. **His application of them is bold and shocking**; for although **the Judaizers can claim physical descent from Sarah**, Sha'ul (PAUL) calls them **spiritual descendants of Hagar**. Revelation 11:8 has an equally surprising reversal of traditional Jewish identifications. But such shocks are not limited to the New Testament—see Ezekiel 23, 34 and Hosea 1–2 for comparable examples in the Tanakh. (See online source [Jewish New Testament and comments of David H. Stern](#))

**For these women are two covenants** - Hagar and Sarah are not literal covenants of course under the inspiration of the Spirit Paul uses them as illustrations of **two covenants**. The two mothers and two sons represent **two covenants**. Hagar and Ishmael represent the **Old Covenant** of law and works, and Sarah and Isaac represent the **Covenant** of grace and faith, the Abrahamic Covenant (cf Ge 15:7-17, 18+) which was the precursor so to speak of the New Covenant.

**Barton** adds that "Paul didn't say it, but the readers could infer that the other woman represented the covenant with Abraham (Genesis 17:15-17), the covenant of promise—children of a free woman are free. This covenant of promise looked toward a new covenant, ushered in by Christ. This had already arrived, but the Jews did not accept it. (See context in [Life Application Bible Commentary – Galatians](#))

**Covenant** (1242) ([diatheke](#) from [diatithemi](#) = set out in order, dispose in a certain order <> from [dia](#) = two + [tithemi](#) = to place

pictures that which is placed between two Thus, a covenant is something placed between two = thus an arrangement between two parties) literally conveys the idea of a testament, as in one's last will and testament. **Diatheke uses in Galatians** - Gal. 3:15; Gal. 3:17; Gal. 4:24;

#### Related Resources:

- [Covenant: Abrahamic versus Mosaic](#)
- [Covenant: New Covenant in the Old Testament](#)
- [Covenant: Why the New is Better](#)
- [Covenant: Abrahamic vs Old vs New](#)

## HAGAR ILLUSTRATES THE LAW

**One proceeding from Mount Sinai bearing children who are to be slaves; she is Hagar- One = One** covenant, the Mosaic Covenant, the Old Covenant. At Mt Sinai God gave the Law through Moses and required God's chosen people, the Jews, to keep all the commands. Mount Sinai was a terrifying experience. Moses warned the Israelites don't go near the mountain or touch the mountain lest you die. (Read Ex 19:12-13, 16, 21; Heb 12:20, 21+) The point was in essence not to go near to the mountain because it symbolizes the Law and if you break the Law you die. And not only that the phrase who are **to be slaves** describes the fact that it was humanly impossible to keep the Law and thus it produced in essence "religious **slaves**, as it were, bound to a master from whom they could never escape. Anyone, including a Jew, who attempted to satisfy God and gain freedom from condemnation by trying to live up to that covenant in his own self-righteousness was spiritually like a child of **Hagar**, the bondwoman (**ED: AND THIS INCLUDED THE JUDAIZERS WHO PRIDED THEMSELVES ON BEING FROM SARAH NOT HAGAR - BUT AS STERN SAYS HERE PAUL IS SAYING SINCE THEY ARE SLAVES TO THE LAW THEY ARE LIVING LIKE HAGAR IS THEIR MOTHER! TALK ABOUT MAKE THEM MAD!**). He (**ED: THE ONE TRYING TO KEEP THE LAW GIVEN AT MOUNT SINAI**) was a slave, struggling for a freedom he could not obtain by his own efforts." (MacArthur) Can you imagine the impact this statement by Paul had on the Judaizers?

To reiterate, note what Paul is doing under the inspiration of the Spirit -- he is comparing the Jews (those who did not receive Jesus - Jn 1:11-12) to Ishmael, a Gentile, instead of to Isaac, a Jew, because the Christ-rejecting Jews (including those seducing the Galatian believers) proudly considered themselves as children of Abraham (e.g., read Jn 8:33 where the even got their history wrong! They had been enslaved in Egypt! Cf the cry of the rich man in Hades who still "lays claim" to Abraham as his father! Genetically yes, spiritually no! see Lk 16:24-25+) and under the covenant with Abraham. The missed the vital truth that the Abrahamic Covenant could be entered into only by grace through faith, not by works! And so in their centuries long spiritual confusion, the Jews (who rejected Messiah) failed to realize that they were children of the covenant with Moses, the covenant of law!

**Barton** goes on to elaborate that "The Judaizers claimed superiority for their point of view by claiming that the blessings of the covenant came to descendants of Abraham through Isaac. Gentile Christians could be "adopted" into Abraham's covenant group by accepting circumcision. Paul contradicted the Judaizers by showing that those who promote (KEEPING) the law for salvation or sanctification demonstrate the characteristics of slavery to the law. **Paul claimed that they were products of the Sinai covenant, not Abraham's covenant.** Trying to win salvation by obeying the law leads to slavery, and as the Jews persisted in this pattern, they showed themselves to be enslaved to their law. Thus, the covenant with Moses on Mount Sinai **"bears children who are to be slaves"** (niv). Although the Jews had descended from Abraham and Isaac, as they tried to piously obey their laws, **they were actually slaves to it!** As slaves, they were more like children of the slave woman, Hagar. Thus, they were more like Ishmael than Isaac. (See context in [Life Application Bible Commentary – Galatians](#))

Paul's argument is brilliant, peerless and piercing!

**Preacher's Outline and Sermon Bible - Hagar**, that is, the law, bears children to slavery. The law says "do this" and "don't do that." It *demand*s and *insists* on obedience. It **enslaves** a person to do exactly what it says. Therefore, if a person hopes to approach God in his own goodness, merit, virtue, morality, and righteousness, he is in **bondage to the law**. He must keep it in order to be good and moral and righteous and to earn the favor of God. The law, the rules and regulations of goodness and righteousness, **enslaves** him. (Keep in mind, Paul is not saying the law is not good. We are to live righteously and morally, but we are not acceptable to God because of our goodness and self-efforts. We do not save ourselves; we are not to be praised because of our works and goodness. Praise belongs to God. God is the One who saves us. This is what is being discussed.) (**ED: Believers are free from the ceremonial laws that distinguished Israel from the pagans but were fulfilled in Christ. Believers are still subject to the moral law of God, but now have the power to keep it by relying on the Holy Spirit - cf Ro 8:12-13+**) (See context in [Preacher's Outline and Sermon Bible](#))

**Allegorically speaking** (238)(**allegoreo** from **allos** = another + **agoreuo** = to speak in a place of assembly or market place an **agora**) means "to employ an analogy or likeness in communicating." (**Louw-Nida Friberg** - "as aiming to convey other than the literal meaning...talk figuratively, illustrate with an (implied) comparison." **BDAG** = "to use analogy or likeness to express something." **Liddell-Scott** - "to speak so as to imply something other than what is said." **MacArthur** says **allegoreuo** is "literally "to speak other than one seems to speak." It was used of a story that conveyed meaning other than what was apparent in the literal sense of the words. It has the idea of one thing being represented under the image of another. In this case, the spiritual truth is **illustrated** by the historical story, and translating "analogically" is consistent with the basic meaning of the Greek."

**Gilbrant** - The Greek word sometimes translated "**allegory**" (allēgoroumena) is here better translated "**illustration**." Allēgoreō was especially employed in antiquity to denote a particular type of interpretation. Its basic sense is "to speak figuratively," although allēgoreō should not necessarily be understood as the Greek equivalent to the English term allegory. Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress is properly called an allegory, but it is extreme allegory and far-removed from what Scripture speaks of. Philo, a contemporary of Paul, is one well-known Jewish allegorist of the ancient world. Throughout church history leaders like Origen have sought to establish allegorical systems of interpretation which have as their goal to discover "hidden meanings" in Scripture. Such attempts violate the nature and intent of Scripture and are ultimately contrived.

**Preacher's Outline and Sermon Bible** - Note: Paul says that these things are an allegory, that is, **an illustration of truth** can be seen and drawn from the event. (See context in [Preacher's Outline and Sermon Bible](#))

**Donald Campbell** points out that "this '**allegorizing**' is a far cry from the practice of 'allegorical interpretation'—followed by Origen, Augustine, and many others down through the ages into the present day—in which the historical facts are relegated to a lower, less significant level and fanciful, hidden meanings unrelated to the text, are considered vastly more important." ([Bible Knowledge Commentary](#))

#### Related Resources:

- [Interpretation of Symbols - Rise of Allegorical Method](#) - **If you are not familiar with the Allegorical Method, you need to read this link to educate yourself.** This is more than just a pedantic exercise, for how one interprets the Bible has far reaching ramifications! And if you are a teacher or a preacher remember there will be a day of accountability so we ALL (yours truly included) need to "**Be diligent** (command - [aorist imperative](#)) to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth." (2 Timothy 2:15+)

**Excerpt** - "Literal is not opposed to spiritual but to figurative; spiritual is an antithesis on the one hand to material, and on the other to carnal (in a bad sense). The Literalist is not one who denies that figurative language, that symbols are used in prophecy, nor does he deny that great spiritual truths are set forth therein; his position is simply, that the prophecies are to be normally interpreted (i.e., according to the received laws of language) as any other utterances are interpreted—that which is manifestly literal being regarded as literal, and that which is manifestly figuratively being so regarded. The position of the **Spiritualist** is not that which is properly indicated by the term. He is one who holds that certain portions are to be normally interpreted, other portions are to be regarded as having a **mystical sense**. The terms properly expressive of the schools are normal and mystical." (John Peter Lange, A Commentary on the Holy Scripture: Revelation, p. 98)

#### Related Resources:

- [What is wrong with the allegorical interpretation method?](#)
- [What is biblical literalism?](#)
- [Can/should we interpret the Bible as literal?](#)
- [Does the Bible contain allegory?](#)
- [How can I recognize and understand biblical symbolism?](#)

## IS GALATIANS 4:24ff AN ALLEGORY OR AN ILLUSTRATION?

**John MacArthur** has an interesting approach to the word **allegory** - Simple explanation of an allegory would run like this: an allegory is a story, fictional or true, the meaning of which is not found in the story. Did you get that? That's the simplest way to explain an allegory. It is a story, fictional or true, the meaning of which is not found in the story. Another way to say it would be on

the negative: on its face, the story by itself is meaningless, unless somebody tells you the secret meaning. Allegories always hide a secret meaning. And for an allegory to communicate anything intentionally we have to know the secret meaning. **There is no allegory anywhere in the Bible. That is to say, there is no story, fictional or true, that on its surface is meaningless and there is some hidden midden that is the real meaning.** There are none in the Bible. This is the only place in the Bible where the verb **allegoreo** is used. And instead of translating **allegoreo**, they **transliterated** it into “allegory.” They just took the Greek word and gave it an English sound. They should have **translated** it. What does **allegoreo** mean? (**ED**: **allegoreo** from **allos** + **agoreu**) **Agoreu** means “to speak in public.” **Allos** means “another.” “To speak in public,” and “another.” Putting those two together, this is what **allegoreo** means “**to speak of one thing by referring to another,**”**to speak of one thing by referring to another.**” That is not on its face an allegory, that is an illustration. You could say, “He runs like the wind.” That’s not an allegory. You’re talking about somebody’s speed and you’re using a figure of speech to communicate it. In other words, you’re explaining his running by something else – figures of speech, analogies, illustrations, even parables that our Lord gave. He’s the only one who gave parables. And parables could be viewed as allegorical, except for the fact that He always explained them and their illustrations.

**There is nothing in the Bible with secret meaning, nothing that’s hidden so that no one can really know the meaning.**This is not true among the ancient rabbis. They’re typically – the ancient rabbis in Judaism – were literally up to their eyeballs in allegories. If you read ancient Jewish literature you run into it all the time. For example, when you read in the Bible about the Euphrates River, the rabbis said that’s not a river. The Euphrates River that goes from Ur of the Chaldees in the north down to the land of Canaan in the south is not a river; that’s an allegory of the journey of a stoic philosopher from sensual understanding to spiritual enlightenment. It’s crazy, no one would know that. First of all, it’s not true. The Euphrates is a river, and water goes from Ur to Canaan. This is not the journey of a stoic philosopher from sensual to spiritual understanding. There were interpreters, rabbinical interpreters in the city of Alexandria, Egypt, so that allegorical interpretation of the Old Testament is associated with Alexandrian interpretation. Caught on in the Roman Catholic system, as you probably know, to the point that Roman Catholic scholars said the two coins that the good Samaritan gave to the innkeeper, those aren’t really coins. That’s an allegory for baptism and the Lord’s Supper. Here’s another one. Job’s seven sons weren’t actually his seven sons, they were the twelve apostles. That’s ridiculous, and bad math. And Job’s friends were the heretics, and his seven thousand sheep were God’s people, and the three thousand camels were the depraved Gentiles. That’s what an allegory looks like. ([Sermon](#))

**Galatians 4:25 Now this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia and corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children.**

KJV Galatians 4:25 For this Agar is mount Sinai in Arabia, and answereth to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children.

- **Now this Hagar is Mount Sinai** Deuteronomy 33:2; Judges 5:5; Psalms 68:8,17; Hebrews 12:18
- **Arabia** Galatians 1:17; Acts 1:11
- **corresponds to the present Jerusalem.** Matthew 23:37; Luke 13:34; 19:44
- Galatians 4 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries
- Galatians 4:21-5:1 - Don Anderson [Galatians Study 9](#); [More Notes on Galatians Study 9](#)
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- a. The two mothers representing two covenants (Galatians 4:24a)
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  1. The one representing a covenant of bondage (Galatians 4:24b-25)
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The conclusion from the story (Galatians 4:31)

**NEXT IN LINE AFTER MT SINAI  
IS JERUSALEM**

Not only do the two women and their two children represent **two covenants**, but Paul now explains that they also represent **two Jerusalems**.

**Now this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia and corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children.**-

Note that **Mount Sinai** is in **Arabia** (See [Arabian Peninsula](#) and [Sinai Peninsula - map](#)) which is a desert land and is not the Promised Land. Hagar's literal son Ishmael in fact eventually moved to the desert areas east and south of the Promised Land.

What Paul is saying is that **"Hagar**, the law, represents the very center of a religion of law and works which was Jerusalem of that day. Note that Paul makes two connections to stress the point: (1) **Hagar** stands for **Mount Sinai**, the Mount in Arabia where the law was given. (2) **Hagar** and **Mount Sinai** both picture the very center of a religion of law and works, the (present) **Jerusalem** of that day. Of course, **Hagar** also pictures **ANY** religion, church, people, or person who seeks to be righteous and acceptable to God and heaven through works and law. (The Preacher's Outline & Sermon Bible – Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians.)

**MacArthur** - This is the next part of the illustration in line (ED: THE MEANING OF GREEK WORD TRANSLATED "CORRESPONDS"). Hagar equals Ishmael; Ishmael equals Sinai. Hagar is a slave, Ishmael is a slave, and the Law given at Sinai was bondage with a death sentence....It is obvious that the holy city was also the location for the consummation of the New Covenant in the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, but because the people rejected that New Testament in blood, the present Jerusalem, like Mount Sinai in Arabia, is where Hagar still figuratively lives in slavery with her unbelieving children—self-righteous, Christ-rejecting, grace-ignoring Jews. Except for a relatively few believers, the Jewish inhabitants of geographical Jerusalem in Paul's day were truly in deep bondage to damning legalism. And the Judaizers in Galatia were trying to subvert believing Jews back into that bondage—to the ritual, ceremony, self-effort, and all other works of the flesh that constitute the hopeless slavery of the spiritual children of Hagar. ([A Perfect Portrait of Saving Faith, Part 2](#))

**The present Jerusalem** - Paul is speaking of the Jerusalem of his day, the Jerusalem of the first century. What is he implying? This ancient Jerusalem is the city from which the Judaizers had come with their legalistic (Pharisaic) system connected to Mount Sinai which in turn is connected to Ishmael who in turn is connected to Hagar. This is not what the Judaizers would want to hear because as discussed above, they took great pride in being in the line of Abraham. Paul is saying with this illustration that they might be genetically physically related to Abraham, from a spiritual standpoint they were the the children of Hagar; the children of Ishmael, the present Jerusalem is that is connected to Mount Sinai.

**MacArthur** succinctly summarizes Paul's illustrations (some repetition of previous comment) - "It goes like this: **Hagar** equal **Ishmael** equals **Sinai** equals **Jerusalem** equals the **flesh** equals the **law** equals bondage equals condemnation, trying to do God's will in the flesh. That's what the Judaizers were doing. That's what all false religion does. Hagar, Sinai, Ishmael, the present Jerusalem just produces more slaves, more slaves, more slaves in bondage to sin, in bondage to the judgment.... So, **Hagar, Ishmael, Sinai, present Jerusalem** are all in the same line. **They all produce slavery and bondage**. A sinner who seeks to be saved by the law is in that line, and he's on a legalistic treadmill. He can be on that treadmill his whole life, and he will get off exactly where he got on. Ishmael is the child of the flesh, nothing more. And the present Jerusalem is fleshly, connected to Ishmael/Hagar. I can't imagine the fury of the Judaizers to hear that, because they all proudly despised Hagar and Ishmael. ([A Perfect Portrait of Saving Faith, Part 2](#))

**Corresponds** (4960) (**sustoicheo** from **sun** = together + **stoicheo** = to proceed in order) means to advance in order together. It was used in classic Greek of soldiers standing in the same line or row (*Liddell-Scott*). The related noun **sustoichia** denotes a series of things or ideas. It is especially important to Pythagorean philosophy which speaks of series of coordinate pairs. Paul uses the term in Galatians 4:25 where he used Sarah and Hagar in a series of comparisons and contrasts to show the Galatians they were children of freedom and not slaves to the yoke of Judaism.

**Gilbrant** notes that Paul "used **sustoicheō** to tell his readers that Hagar "**corresponds**" (or represents for the purpose of this story) to the earthly Jerusalem because, like Hagar who was bound to Sarah as her servant, Jerusalem (i.e., the Jews) is also in bondage to the Law." (Ibid)

**A T Robertson** - Late word in Polybius for keeping step in line (military term) and in papyri in figurative sense as here. Lightfoot refers to the Pythagorean parallels of opposing principles (sunstoichiai) as shown here by Paul (Hagar and Sarah, Ishmael and Isaac, the old covenant and the new covenant, the earthly Jerusalem and the heavenly Jerusalem). That is true, and there is a correlative correspondence as the line is carried on. ([Galatians 4 - Robertson's Word Pictures in the New Testament](#))

**Barton** sums up Paul's brilliant illustrative argument to this point - Paul's assignment of symbols must have shocked the Judaizers. Paul was really condemning the Judaizers. They tended to practice historical denial about their national experience. For example, at one time Jesus claimed that his teaching was the truth that would set them free. The Jews scorned the idea that they needed to be freed. "We are Abraham's descendants," they replied, "and have never been slaves of anyone. How can you say that we shall be set



free?" (John 8:33 niv). The very ones who claimed freedom were at that moment under the domination of Rome. Later, Jesus directly challenged their claim to be Abraham's children (see John 8:31-47): "If you were Abraham's children," said Jesus, "then you would do the things Abraham did" (John 8:39 niv). Paul was making the same point to the Galatians and the Judaizers who tried to influence them. Abraham believed in and obeyed God (Ge 12:1-4; Ge 15:6; Ge 22:1-14), and he welcomed God's messengers (Ge 18:1-8). (See context in [Life Application Bible Commentary – Galatians](#))

## **NOT WHO'S YOUR DADDY BUT WHO'S YOUR MAMA?**

Given that the word **corresponds** describes a series of things, [Ray Pritchard](#) "lines up" two types of living which are diametrically opposed...From one man the two lines of humanity come forth:

1. The line of works and self-effort looks like this: Abraham > Hagar > Ishmael > Mt. Sinai > The Law > Earthly Jerusalem > Bondage > Death
2. The line of faith looks like this: Abraham > Sarah > Isaac > Mt. Zion > The Gospel > Grace > Faith in Christ > Freedom, forgiveness, salvation > Heaven

Note that Abraham stands at the head of both lines. That's why it's not enough to be Abraham's son. You must also be a son or daughter of Sarah if you want to go to heaven. So the question is not, "Who's your father?" The real question is, "Who's your mother?"

### **Galatians 4:26 But the Jerusalem above is free; she is our mother.**

KJV Galatians 4:26 But Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all.

NLT Galatians 4:26 But the other woman, Sarah, represents the heavenly Jerusalem. She is the free woman, and she is our mother.

- **Jerusalem** Ps 87:3-6; Isaiah 2:2,3; 52:9; 62:1,2; 65:18; 66:10; Joel 3:17; Micah 4:1,2; Philippians 3:20; Hebrews 12:22; Revelation 3:12; 21:2,10-27
- **free** Galatians 4:22; 5:1; John 8:36; Romans 6:14,18; 1 Peter 2:16
- **mother** Song 8:1,2; Isaiah 50:1; Hosea 2:2,5; 4:5; Revelation 17:5
- Galatians 4 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries
- Galatians 4:21-5:1 - Don Anderson [Galatians Study 9](#); [More Notes on Galatians Study 9](#)
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The conclusion from the story (Galatians 4:31)

## **CONTRAST WITH THE JERUSALEM ABOVE**

**But** - Term of contrast - In this case the contrast is dramatic and diametrically opposite the present "Jerusalem."

**MacArthur** - The **Jerusalem** that is present (Gal 4:25) is the earthly Jerusalem, and it is still (in our modern day) the same way it was during Jesus' time. Listen, contemporary, modern Judaism is slavery, bondage to the law, bondage to sin and judgment and death and hell. It is Hagar, Ishmael, Sinai, flesh, works, slavery, bondage, death. ([A Perfect Portrait of Saving Faith, Part 2](#))



NLT Galatians 4:26 But the other woman, **Sarah, represents the heavenly Jerusalem**. She is the free woman, and she is our mother.

**Preacher's Outline and Sermon Bible** - **Sarah** was a type of the **new covenant** between God and man, the covenant of grace or of promise. Two things are said about the grace and promise of God to man. Sarah, that is, grace, is seen in the **Jerusalem which is above**, the heavenly Jerusalem. Heavenly Jerusalem is the spiritual and eternal city which God has promised to those who approach Him through faith. Sarah and grace and the promise of a heavenly city are all free. Any person who accepts God's promise of a heavenly city which is eternal—who accepts His promise enough to believe it with all his heart, basing all he is and has upon that promise—is acceptable to God. God takes the man's sheer faith—the faith that has cast itself totally upon the promise of God—and counts it as the man's righteousness. Therefore, the man becomes acceptable to God: he is given the promise of God freely—without price—without having to work for it by keeping rules and laws. (See context in [Preacher's Outline and Sermon Bible](#))

**The Jerusalem above is** (estin - [present tense](#) = continually) **free** - One might be confused at first thinking Paul is describing our future residence in the New Jerusalem in Revelation 21-22, but that is not the case. He is using **Jerusalem above** to speak of a present possession of all believers, not so much a place to live, but a new way to live, by the Spirit of grace, not by the flesh and works. This makes all the difference in this world and the world to come! This spiritual freedom in the **Jerusalem above** is in stark contrast to the enslavement of the earthly (present) **Jerusalem**, the legalistic system that can never make one free. This heavenly city is free from law, works and spiritual slavery. Not only that but as free "citizens" of this city we are empowered by the Holy Spirit to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, pleasing Him in all respects. And so we can live today with a foretaste of God's future promise John describes in Rev 21:2+ "And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband."

This picture of **Jerusalem above** also recalls Paul's "heavenly" description of believers in his letter to the Philippians

For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; Who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself. (Phil 3:20-21+)

We also see a parallel passage by the writer of Hebrews who describes believers

**For you have not come to a mountain that can be touched and to a blazing fire**, and to darkness and gloom and whirlwind (MT SINAI - cf Gal 4:24) 19 and to the blast of a trumpet and the sound of words which sound was such that those who heard begged that no further word be spoken to them. 20 For they could not bear the command, "IF EVEN A BEAST TOUCHES THE MOUNTAIN, IT WILL BE STONED." 21 And so terrible was the sight, that Moses said, "I AM FULL OF FEAR and trembling." 22 But **you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem**, and to myriads of angels, (Heb 12:18-22+)

**Robertson on the Jerusalem above** - Paul uses the rabbinical idea that the heavenly Jerusalem corresponds to the one here to illustrate his point without endorsing their ideas. He uses the city of Jerusalem to represent the whole Jewish race (Vincent). ([Galatians 4 - Robertson's Word Pictures in the New Testament](#))

**She is** (estin - [present tense](#) = continually) **our mother** - The closest antecedent is the **Jerusalem above** and the holy city is often referred to in the feminine gender. That could be the case but in context Paul has just associated Hagar with the **present Jerusalem**, so that the **she** in this passage could also be an allusion to Sarah. Note the personal possessive pronoun "**our**." Paul includes himself in this "family" (so to speak) with the Galatian believers. And the verb "**is**" in the [present tense](#) signifies **she is** continually **our mother**! Once (genuinely) saved, always saved, beloved. One she is your mother, she will forever be your "mother!" Your salvation is [eternally secure in Christ](#)!

**THOUGHT** - Dear reader, is **Jerusalem above** your mother? Are you free in Christ by grace through faith in His once for all fully atoning, substitutionary sacrifice, burial and resurrection? **Or** are you like the Galatian believers, being enticed/seduced by other "legalists" in your fellowship (who may "look good" because legalism always seeks to "look good" before men, majoring on the "externals" but being woefully deficient on the "internals!")? Then leave Hagar, Mt Sinai and the present Jerusalem and come into the freedom of Sarah and the Jerusalem above. You will be free indeed!

Paul is saying to the Galatian believers that (positionally) they have no connection with the **present Jerusalem** but with the **Jerusalem above**. Unfortunately, in practice it is possible to go back and "visit" the **present Jerusalem** (especially when seduced by Judaizers, whether in the first century or today - they are still alive and well!), but that is not now our "home" so to speak. We are to come out of the **present Jerusalem** and walk in the Jerusalem which is above! Paul may also be making an allusion here to Jesus' declaration in Jn 3:3 where He said "unless one is born **again** (Greek = **another** derived from **ano** = above) he cannot see the kingdom of God." The phrase "born again" can also be translated "born from above." The word for **above** here in Gal 4:26 is

**ano** the adverb of place which is the root of **anohen** in Jn 3:3. When **ano** is preceded by the definite article it means what is above, the world above or heaven (cf Jesus' declaration in Jn 8.23).

**Barton** - While Hagar represents the "**present city of Jerusalem**" in its state of slavery (Gal 4:25), Sarah represents **the Jerusalem that is above.**" Jewish thought contained the idea that there was a heavenly Jerusalem and the earthly Jerusalem was just a copy (see Ps 87:1-3; Isa 54:10-14; Ezek 40-48). Paul used the concept **she is our mother** to show that faith, not adherence to the law, is the source of our salvation. **Paul was stacking the major persons (Abraham, Isaac, Ishmael, Hagar), events (covenants), and sites (Mount Sinai, Jerusalem) of Old Testament history to portray the two tracks of humanity: one under legal slavery, the other under freedom established through faith.** By including himself and the Galatians in the **our**, Paul was offering the Galatians the opportunity to claim that they were descendants of Abraham through faith, and that they possessed citizenship in the spiritual Jerusalem. For Gentiles to be included in this way would be as miraculous as the birth of Isaac. (See context in [Life Application New Testament Commentary](#))

**MacArthur - Hagar**, the slave, symbolizes the old covenant; the earthly, legalistic, Judaistic Jerusalem; the Ishmael mentality of law and bondage. **Sarah**, the free woman, symbolizes the new covenant, the heavenly Jerusalem, and the wonderful, wonderful blessing of faith and grace. (AS BELIEVERS) We belong to the Jerusalem that is above. ([A Perfect Portrait of Saving Faith, Part 2](#))

**Free** (unbound, unshackled)(1658)([eleutheros](#) See also [eleutheroo](#)) is an adjective which means freedom to go wherever one likes, at liberty, possessing the capability of movement, exempt from restraint, obligation or liability, unconstrained, unfettered. In short the **eleutheros** man or woman is **free** to realize their destiny in Christ! **Eleutheros** literally of becoming a Roman citizen and metaphorically as in this passage of becoming free in Christ, free to live in the power of the Spirit of Christ (regardless of/independent of circumstances). Note that in Scripture, being **free** is not merely being able to do what we **want**, but experiencing God's power by His Spirit to do what we **ought** (what He desires us to do, living in a manner that pleases Him). The opposite of **eleutheros** is the state of **enslavement** in Ishmael, Hagar, the Old Covenant, Mt Sinai, the present Jerusalem, all of which Paul uses to depict the bondage produced by trying to live under the law. (cf Gal 4:21 = "Tell me, **you who want to be under law**, do you not listen to the law?")

**Eleutheros** is the very same word Jesus used in His great (prophetic) promise "So if the Son makes you **free** ([eleutheroo](#)), you will be **free** ([eleutheros](#)) indeed. (John 8:36)

All 23 uses of **eleutheros** - exempt(1), free(12), free man(2), free men(3), free woman(4), freeman(1). Matt. 17:26; Jn. 8:33; Jn. 8:36; Rom. 6:20; Rom. 7:3; 1 Co. 7:21; 1 Co. 7:22; 1 Co. 7:39; 1 Co. 9:1; 1 Co. 9:19; 1 Co. 12:13; Gal. 3:28; Gal. 4:22; Gal. 4:23; Gal. 4:26; Gal. 4:30; Gal. 4:31; Eph. 6:8; Col. 3:11; 1 Pet. 2:16; Rev. 6:15; Rev. 13:16; Rev. 19:18

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## **Barton - Application - CITIZENSHIP**

Usually citizenship is based on a person's nation of birth. It does not change when the person travels abroad. Someone may spend almost his or her entire life in other countries and still maintain citizenship at home. Our citizenship in the "heavenly Jerusalem" as children in God's family will not be fully realized until the end of time (see Hebrews 11:10, 14-16; 12:22; 13:14; Revelation 3:12; 21:2). Though we may not yet be at home, as believers we carry a passport called the Holy Spirit. We should live each day as true citizens loyal to God. (Life Application Bible Commentary – Galatians)

**Galatians 4:27 For it is written, "REJOICE, BARREN WOMAN WHO DOES NOT BEAR; BREAK FORTH AND SHOUT, YOU WHO ARE NOT IN LABOR; FOR MORE NUMEROUS ARE THE CHILDREN OF THE DESOLATE THAN OF THE ONE WHO HAS A HUSBAND."**

KJV Galatians 4:27 For it is written, Rejoice, thou barren that bearest not; break forth and cry, thou that travailest not: for the desolate hath many more children than she which hath an husband.

- **Rejoice** Isa 54:1-5
- **barren** 1 Sa 2:5; Ps 113:9
- **desolate** Ru 1:11-13; 4:14-16; 2 Sa 13:20; Isa 49:21; 1 Ti 5:5
- Galatians 4 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries
- Galatians 4:21-5:1 - Don Anderson [Galatians Study 9](#); [More Notes on Galatians Study 9](#)
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The conclusion from the story (Galatians 4:31)

## THE BLESSING OF THE JERUSALEM ABOVE AND SARAH

**For** - (gar) - Term of explanation. Paul is going to expand on the blessing of the heavenly Jerusalem who he has just associated with Sarah. So here he seems to focus primarily on the blessing to Sarah who was at one time a **barren woman**.

**What the Bible Teaches** explains that "To link it with the previous verses Sarah was the barren and desolate who cried for children and Hagar the woman who had a husband. But in due time the position was reversed. Thus, although the Law had been prominent in the past, grace had now come into prominence and the vast multitude saved through the gospel would far exceed those under the Law."

**Guzik** - The quotation from Isaiah 54:1 also suggests that there will soon be more Christians than Jews – a promise that was fulfilled. The fourth contrast Paul draws between Christianity and legalism is the contrast between many more and many. The abundance and glory of the New Covenant is shown by the fact that it would soon have many more followers than the Old Covenant. ([Galatians 4 – Heirs and Slaves, Grace and Law](#))

**It is written** (See notes above on [grapho](#)) - This is the second time in this section (Gal 4:21-31) that Paul appeals to the authority of the written Word, the Scriptures. Most of the NT passages of it is written refer to quotes from the Old Testament. Paul will now extol the blessing of **Sarah** and he does so by quoting from the book of Isaiah

"Shout for joy, O barren one, you who have borne no child; Break forth into joyful shouting and cry aloud, you who have not travailed; For the sons of the desolate one will be more numerous Than the sons of the married woman," says the LORD. (Isaiah 54:1)

**Comment** - "In her exile and dispersion, Israel has been destitute, disgraced as a woman who had borne no children (Isa 49:21)." (MacArthur) Isaiah's words comforted the Jewish exiles in Babylon, giving them the prophetic hope that they as a nation would not only be restored (they did return from exile but this was only a partial fulfillment of God's promise), but that their future blessings would be greater than any in the past (Read Isaiah 54:1-9. Notice Isaiah calls for Israel to sing because of the certainty of fulfillment of future fruitfulness for the nation, the fulfillment of which awaits the [Millennium](#), since only at that time could God say He would never be angry with Israel again - Isa 54:9).

**Expositor's Bible Commentary** says "The verse is a prophecy of Jerusalem's restoration following the years of Babylonian captivity and involves the thought that the blessing of the latter years will be greater than that enjoyed formerly." I would disagree for Israel's time after return from Babylon was **not** a time of far **greater blessing** than **formerly**, for one can hardly describe the subjection of the Jews to the Persians described in the book of Esther as greater blessing. The same would go for the subjection to the horrible [Antiochus Epiphanes!](#) No, the **blessing** awaits a future fulfillment, one that Paul would later describe in Romans 11:26+ writing "and so all Israel will be saved (**ED**: ALL JEWS THAT BELIEVE WHEN MESSIAH RETURNS = ONLY 1/3 OF THE NATION - SEE Zech 13:8-9+); just as it is written, "THE DELIVERER WILL COME FROM ZION ([Second Coming](#)), HE WILL REMOVE UNGODLINESS FROM JACOB (See another related prophetic description of this event in Zechariah 12:10-14+, Zech 13:1+ and Zech 13:8-9+)."

**Donald Campbell** comments that "Paul applied this (QUOTE FROM Isaiah 54:1) passage (he did not claim it was fulfilled) in this context to **Sarah**, who though previously barren, was later blessed with a child, and who would ultimately enjoy a greater progeny than Hagar. (BKC)

**REJOICE, BARREN WOMAN WHO DOES NOT BEAR** - **Rejoice** is the first of three staccato-like commands all in the [aorist imperative](#) signifying "Just do it!" ([See need for reliance on the Holy Spirit](#)). The **barren woman** in the previous illustration was

Sarah who for years did not bear the heir of the promise. But believers are related to her in the sense that she eventually did believe God's promise and bore Isaac the son of promise and the result is her barrenness has been miraculously turned into great fruitfulness! And thus there is great reason for great rejoicing!

**Robertson** - The prophet refers to Sarah's prolonged barrenness and Paul uses this fact as a figure for the progress and glory of Christianity (the new Jerusalem of freedom) in contrast with the old Jerusalem of bondage (the current Judaism). His thought has moved rapidly, but he does not lose his line. ([Galatians 4 - Robertson's Word Pictures in the New Testament](#))

**Rejoice** (2165)([euphraino](#) from **eu** = well, good + **phren** = mind, intellect, disposition) means to have a merry outlook, a cheery state of mind because one feels the sense of victory or inner triumph. To be jubilant (used 4 times with this sense in story of Prodigal son = to feast in token of joy),. Generally speaking, **euphraino** indicates the subjective feeling of joy and the related term [agalliao](#) the outward demonstration of joy ("Jump for joy" is the idea).

**Gary Hill** - For believers, euphrainō ("feeling festive") happens by living with an inner sense of triumph because in Christ, i.e. rejoicing as "the Holy Spirit rejoices within" (G. Archer). Experiencing this personal sense of Christ's triumph within comes with receiving and obeying faith (4102/pístis, "God's inbirthed persuasion"). This enables the believer to live from victory – not merely for victory! See Ro 15:20. (Discovery Bible)

**Euphraino** - Lk. 12:19; Lk. 15:23; Lk. 15:24; Lk. 15:29; Lk. 15:32; Lk. 16:19; Acts 2:26; Acts 7:41; Ro 15:10; 2 Co. 2:2; Gal. 4:27; Rev. 11:10; Rev. 12:12; Rev. 18:20

Barrenness in the ancient world brought shame and disgrace to a woman, whereas fruitfulness of one's womb was seen as a blessing of God. The nation of Israel had been unfruitful but as discussed in the comment above on Isaiah 54:1-9, God would restore her and give great blessing which would result in rejoicing. That was the prophetic meaning of the Isaiah passage. Now Paul took that passage of former shame to later blessings and applied it to the spiritual offspring from Sarah's child of promise, Isaac.

**Barton** explains it this way "Because God had promised to bless Abraham and his descendants, she ultimately would have *many more children* (the Christian church grew rapidly and is still growing). While the Jews knew (or should have known) from their own Scriptures that Gentiles would turn to God, two changes astounded them: (1) The Gentiles did not have to become Jews first (as the Judaizers preached); and (2) so many Gentiles became believers that they soon outnumbered Jewish believers. Instead of fulfilling their privileged role to bring God's plan into reality, these Jews were insisting on remaining in control. Their inability to recognize God's acceptance of the Gentiles made them equally unable to rejoice! (See [Life Application New Testament Commentary](#))

**Barren** (4723)(**steiros** from **stereos** = firm, solid, immovable; Root ster- = firm hence English "sterile") means not bearing children, incapable of bearing a child. In the Septuagint use in Isa 54:1, **steiros** is used figuratively to speak of the nation of Israel which will be fruitful in the future (Millenium) Used here in Galatians to describe that in contrast to Sarah's former barrenness, the spiritual line (which would be the Church) coming from Sarah was abundantly fruitful (and the Church continues to grow).

**Steiros** - barren(3), barren woman(1). - Lk. 1:7; Lk. 1:36; Lk. 23:29; Gal. 4:27

**Steiros** in the Septuagint - Ge 11:30 ("Sarai was barren; she had no child."); Ge 25:21; Ge 29:31; Ex 23:26; Dt. 7:14; Jdg. 13:2; Jdg. 13:3; 1 Sa 2:5; Job 24:21; Ps 113:9; Isa. 54:1; Isa. 66:9;

**Bear** (bring forth, born)(5088)([tikto](#)) means to bring forth, to bear, to give birth.

**BREAK FORTH AND SHOUT, YOU WHO ARE NOT IN LABOR** - This continues Paul's call for exultation and praise because of the triumph of grace over law.

**Break forth** (4486)([rhegnumi](#)) means to separate or cause to separate abruptly. To rend, to tear, to burst from external or internal action, often suddenly and with force. Figuratively in this passage to break forth in rejoicing and praise. In classical Greek **rhegnumi** has a variety of meanings much like the various usages of the English word break. It is used of breaking through a battle line, of a ship being broken up or wrecked at sea, of a river breaking over its banks, of breaking out into song, and of infants beginning to speak.

**Shout** (994)([boao](#) from **boe**) means raise a cry, call or shout of joy, pain, etc, by using one's voice with unusually high volume. In several of the NT contexts (and many more of the [Septuagint = LXX](#) uses - where it is found 113 times!) crying out was in the context of one seeking help or assistance which is not the sense in the present passage. **Thayer** notes that in classical Greek **boaō** was especially used to denote a manifestation of feelings or emotions, which is the use in the present context.

**Boaō** - called, 1; cried, 1; cry, 1; crying, 4; loudly declaring, 1; shout, 1; shouted, 1; shouting, 2. Mt. 3:3; Mk. 1:3; 15:34; Lk. 3:4; 9:38; 18:7, 38; Jn. 1:23; Acts 8:7; 17:6; 25:24; Gal. 4:27

**In labor** (5605) see preceding discussion of [odino](#).

**FOR MORE NUMEROUS ARE THE CHILDREN OF THE DESOLATE** - The **desolate** one is again a reference to **Sarah** when she was barren and had no offspring. And once she did believe and bring forth the promised son, he was the beginning of the fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham in Ge 15:5 when God "took him outside and said, "Now look toward the heavens, and count the stars, if you are able to count them." And He said to him, "So shall your descendants be." While at the time Paul wrote the Jews (non-believing) still probably were more numerous than the numbers of Gentile believers, the numbers of Christians would outnumber those within Judaism (if that had not even already begun to occur).

**Desolate** ([2048](#)) ([eremos](#)) when used as an adjective, normally describes places which are abandoned, desolate, or unpopulated.

**THAN OF THE ONE WHO HAS A HUSBAND** - In context this has to refer to Hagar, who did not bring forth the promised son.

**Kenneth Gangel** - This quote from Isaiah 54:1 contrasts the future lineages of the two women. Sarah (grace) was initially barren, but she ended up with innumerable spiritual children because of the Abrahamic Covenant. She eventually surpassed the younger Hagar. The intended comparison was between the growth of Christianity (grace) and the stagnation of Judaism (law) in the first century. Paul is challenging the Galatians to choose Christ (grace) and be a part of what God was doing in their day. (See context [Holman New Testament Commentary - Galatians, Ephesians](#))

### Galatians 4:28 And you brethren, like Isaac, are children of promise.

KJV Galatians 4:28 Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are the children of promise. (Note Textus Receptus has "we" while newer manuscripts have "you.")

- Gal 4:23; 3:29; Acts 3:25; Ro 4:13-18; 9:8,9
- Galatians 4 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries
- Galatians 4:21-5:1 - Don Anderson [Galatians Study 9](#); [More Notes on Galatians Study 9](#)
- [Warren Wiersbe's sermon Born Free - Galatians 4](#) - one of the simplest and most profound expositions you will ever hear on Galatians 4!

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- a. The two mothers representing two covenants (Galatians 4:24a)
- b. The description of the two covenants (Galatians 4:24b-28)
  1. The one representing a covenant of bondage (Galatians 4:24b-25)
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- c. The expulsion of the slave woman and her son (Galatians 4:29-30)

The conclusion from the story (Galatians 4:31)

## PAUL ADDRESSES THE GALATIANS DIRECTLY

**And you brethren - You brethren** refers to the Galatians and the context (**children of promise**) indicates Paul accepts them as spiritual **brethren** in Christ. He repeats **brethren** throughout this letter with the same intent (Gal 1:11, Gal 3:15, Gal 4:12, 28, 31, Gal 5:11, 13, Gal 6:1)

**Barton** - Paul hammered home his point to the Galatian believers: "As children of the promise, you never need to be enslaved to the Jewish laws. You are like Isaac!" This key confirmation ensures that believers are free, possess all the rights as true children, and receive all the love and grace they need. (See context in [Life Application New Testament Commentary](#))

**Like Isaac, are children of promise** - (cf Ro 9:8-9+) Not by virtue of natural descent but by virtue of promise. Like Isaac Paul's brethren in Galatia had also experienced a supernatural or miraculous birth reflecting God's grace and their reception by faith of God's promise of salvation in Christ.

**THOUGHT** - Since Christians experience a supernatural work of grace at their new birth, we should not live as enslaved sons but continue to daily walk in that same supernatural grace. How are you doing? Are you slipping back into the "performance mentality" (the Judaizers would commend you if you are!)? Are you trying to obey God by keeping rules or by relying on His Spirit's empowerment? Paul commanded the saints in Colossians



2:6+ "Therefore as you have received Christ Jesus the Lord (BY GRACE THROUGH FAITH - CF "CHILDREN OF PROMISE"), so **walk** ([present imperative](#) - [See Need for the Holy Spirit to obey](#)) in Him."

**John MacArthur** comments that "Every believer, like Isaac, is supernaturally conceived, miraculously born, and the offspring of God's promise to Abraham fulfilled in Christ. Those who have begun to sink back into the trap of legalistic Judaism must remember that they are children of promise, who owe their life not to their own effort but to the miraculous power of God, just as Isaac did in the physical realm. God's sovereign power of grace gave them life, and to fall back under law was to deny that divine work and to dishonor God." (See context in [The MacArthur New Testament Commentary](#))

**Robert Rapa** - He encourages the Galatians to follow his teaching by giving them the benefit of the doubt, suggesting that they think of themselves as Sarah's children, children of promise, as was Isaac. Thus there is no need to adopt a Jewish [nomistic](#) lifestyle; they are free and not to be associated with Hagar, Mount Sinai, and the law. Despite the Judaizers' claims to the contrary, believers in Christ are children of the heavenly Jerusalem through God's promise to Abraham. The Galatians who follow Paul's teaching and embrace freedom in Christ and reject the Judaizers' gospel are indeed children of promise. (Expositor's Bible Commentary)

In this case **promise** refers to God keeping His **promise** to Sarah Moses recording "Then the LORD took note of Sarah as He had said, and the LORD did for Sarah as He had **promised**." (Ge 21:1) **Isaac** was the child that God had promised. As an aside, God always keeps His promises beloved!

**Promise** (1860)([epaggelia/epangelia](#) from **epí** = intensifies verbal meaning + **aggéllō** = to tell, declare) literally means to "tell at or upon" and originally referred to an announcement or declaration (especially of a favorable message) (see Acts 23:21+). In other words the first sense of **epaggelia** is that of a . declaration to do something which came to be associated with the implication of obligation to carry out what is stated and thus the meaning of a promise, pledge or offer. In Scripture, **epaggelia** refers primarily to God's pronouncements that provide assurance of what He intends to do (i.e., in this context to give Sarah a child by Abraham against impossible odds).

**Eppagelia** in Galatians -Gal. 3:14; Gal. 3:16; Gal. 3:17; Gal. 3:18; Gal. 3:21; Gal. 3:22; Gal. 3:29; Gal. 4:23; Gal. 4:28

**John Piper** adds "Our real life is not, like Ishmael's, simply owing to the work of man. Our real life is owing to the work of God in us fulfilling his promise to make for himself a people (Genesis 12:1-3) and to put his Spirit within them (Ezekiel 36:27+) and write his law on their hearts (Jeremiah 31:33+). ([Hagar and Slavery Vs. Sarah and Freedom](#))

**Galatians 4:29 But as at that time he who was born according to the flesh persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, so it is now also.**

KJV Galatians 4:29 But as then he that was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the Spirit, even so it is now.

- **he who was born according to the flesh** Genesis 21:9
- **him who was born according to the Spirit** John 3:5; 15:9; Romans 8:1,13
- **so it is now also** Galatians 5:11; 6:12-14; Matthew 23:34-37; 1 Thessalonians 2:14,15; Hebrews 10:33,34
- Galatians 4 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries
- Galatians 4:21-5:1 - Don Anderson [Galatians Study 9](#); [More Notes on Galatians Study 9](#)
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The conclusion from the story (Galatians 4:31)



## THE CHILD FLESH WARS AGAINST THE CHILD OF THE SPIRIT

Mark it down beloved that "**Legalists persecute those living in liberty.**" (Constable)

**But as at that time he who was born according to the flesh-** Paul now goes back to the account in Genesis as he brings his argument to a conclusion.

**Persecuted him - Persecuted** is in the [imperfect tense](#) indicating that Ishmael was repeatedly harassing Isaac, over and over, again and again. This refers to Ishmael's treatment of Isaac at the time Abraham celebrated Isaac's weaning with a banquet...

The child grew and was weaned, and Abraham made a great feast on the day that Isaac was weaned. "Now Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had borne to Abraham, **mocking.**" (Genesis 21:8-9)

**Comment** - The Greek translates Hebrew for **mocking** with the verb [paizo](#) (derived from **pais** = child) means act as a child and to mock and the [present tense](#) describes this as Ishmael's continual activity. And of course this story in Genesis is the pathogenesis (so to speak) of the current Arab-Israeli tension in the Middle East.

**Like mother, like son** - recall that Moses had recorded that "when she (HAGAR) saw that she had conceived, I (SARAH) was despised in her sight." (Ge 16:5).

**Related Resource:**

- [Why do Jews and Arabs / Muslims hate each other?](#)

**Persecuted** (1377) ([dioko](#) from **dío** = pursue, prosecute, persecute) means to follow or press hard after, literally to pursue as one does a fleeing enemy. It means to chase, harass, vex and pressure and was used for **chasing down criminals**.

**Vine** mentions that the "rabbinic tradition that Ishmael, under pretense of play, shot an arrow at Isaac with intent to kill him." There is no Scriptural support for this assertion. Moreover, the history of the descendants of the brothers shows their inveterate antagonism. The continuous tense ([imperfect tense](#)) of the verb, "was persecuting," lends support to the idea that the apostle has the Ishmaelites and the Israelites in mind."

The phrase **according to the flesh** of course refers to by natural descent but also is a double entendre because it was also **according to the flesh** in that it was a fleshly sinful decision of Sarah and Abraham to have Abraham father a child from Hagar in a vain attempt to fulfill God's promise of a son.

**Henry Morris** - Ishmael, who was fourteen years older than Isaac, no doubt had been hoping (along with his mother Hagar) that he would inherit Abraham's wealth. Therefore, he viciously **mocked** little Isaac the day Isaac was weaned (Genesis 21:8,9), and it became obvious that Isaac would be in danger as long as Ishmael and Hagar were a part of the household. Similarly, Paul says, those who trust in salvation by grace through faith alone will be subject to mocking and persecution by those who wish to impose legalistic bondage or pagan philosophy on the church, as long as they are permitted to have an influence there. ([persecuted](#) in Defender's Study Bible)

**Donald Campbell** - Paul likened the Judaizers to Ishmael as those who were born out of legalistic self-effort; he charged that they continued to persecute the true believers who were born by the power of the Spirit. With few exceptions Paul's persecution came from the Jews, the people in bondage to the Law. (BKC)

**Rapa** - Paul would have the Galatians understand that the presence of those who would confuse and harass them by distorting the message of the gospel and so rob them of their freedom in Christ (cf. Gal 1:7+; Gal 3:1-5+) is nothing new in God's redemptive program. (See context in [Galatians](#).)

**James Montgomery Boice** gives us a solemn word of warning that the persecution Christians face "will not always be by the world but also and indeed more often by their half-brothers – the unbelieving but religious people in the nominal church. This is the lesson of history...Today the greatest enemies of the believing church are found among the members of the unbelieving church, the greatest opposition emanating from pulpits and church hierarchies."

**John Stott** adds to Boice's comment - "It has always been so. The Lord Jesus was bitterly opposed, rejected, mocked and condemned by His own nation. The fiercest opponents of the apostle Paul, who dogged his footsteps and stirred up strife against him, were the official church, the Jews. The monolithic structure of the medieval papacy persecuted all Protestant minorities with ruthless, unremitting ferocity. And the greatest enemies of the evangelical faith today are not unbelievers, who when they hear the

gospel often embrace it, but the church, the establishment, the hierarchy. Isaac is always mocked and persecuted by Ishmael." (See context in [The Message of Galatians](#))

**Jack Arnold** adds that "Grace is always persecuted by law and this is even true in fundamental Christian circles. Those who hold strongly to sovereign elective grace in salvation are persecuted by those who hold some form of human free will in salvation. Persecution for belief in the doctrines of grace should be expected and should not discourage those who hold to these precious truths. Persecution is an evidence that one is teaching grace rather than law, good works or human merit in salvation." ([The Incompatibility of law and Grace](#))

**John Piper** - Recall how in Gal 4:23+ the contrast was between one born according to the flesh and one born through promise. But notice here in verse 29 that the same contrast is between one born **according to the flesh** and one **born according to the Spirit**. "**Born according to the Spirit**" is interchangeable with "born through promise." This confirms that "**children of promise**" in Gal 4:28 refers to people whose inner life is the work of God's Spirit in fulfillment of his promise. The difference between Ishmael-types and Isaac-types is a supernatural work of the Spirit of God. ([Sermon](#))

**Who was born according to the Spirit**- Paul says that Sarah's conception of Isaac had supernatural intervention. It was miraculous because of her age and the deadness of her womb. It was not miraculous like the Spirit's conception of Jesus (Mt 1:18), for there no earthly father was involved.

When Nicodemus came to Jesus asking about entrance into the Kingdom of God,

Jesus answered and said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, **unless one is born again** he cannot see the kingdom of God." ..."Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, **unless one is born of water and the Spirit** he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." (John 3:3,5)

Compare Paul's teaching in Galatians 3

So then those who are of faith are blessed with Abraham, the believer. (Gal 3:9)

But the Scripture has shut up everyone under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe. (Gal 3:22)

**So it is now also** - Just as Isaac was in danger from the older Ishmael, so too the Galatian believers were in danger from the Judaizers. Paul now puts the Judaizers squarely in his aim and in effect says they are playing the part of modern day "Ishmaels" in persecuting the modern day "Isaacs," those who have been born again by grace through faith.

**Don Anderson** - Who were the ones that persecuted Jesus the most? The LEGALISTS—the Scribes and the Pharisees—the ones keeping the Mosaic Law. He's saying "just as it is now." ([Study 9 Teacher Notes](#))

**MacArthur** adds that "Throughout history, and still today, the physical and spiritual descendants of Hagar and Ishmael have, respectively, opposed and persecuted the physical and spiritual descendants of Sarah and Isaac. Those who hold to salvation by works, trusting in their own performance of the law hate those who proclaim salvation by grace without works. In their own minds, the Judaizers thought of themselves as the legitimate, God-honored descendants of Abraham through Isaac. But Paul was saying something that would infuriate them more than anything else, namely, that they, and all other unbelievers, are as much the spiritual descendants of Ishmael as the Arabs are his physical descendants....Whether within Judaism or Christianity, legalists have always been persecutors. Those who trust in God have always been persecuted by those who trust in themselves. True believers have always been more mistreated and oppressed by religionists than by atheists. It is the false religious system of Revelation 17:6 that is "drunk with the blood of the saints."

**Galatians 4:30 But what does the Scripture say? "CAST OUT THE BONDWOMAN AND HER SON, FOR THE SON OF THE BONDWOMAN SHALL NOT BE AN HEIR WITH THE SON OF THE FREE WOMAN."**

KJV Galatians 4:30 Nevertheless what saith the scripture? Cast out the bondwoman and her son: for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman.

- **what does the Scripture say** Galatians 3:8,22; Romans 4:3; 11:2; James 4:5
- **cast out the bondwoman** - Genesis 21:10-12; Romans 11:7-11
- **for the son of the bondwoman** - John 8:35; Romans 8:15-17
- Galatians 4 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries
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The conclusion from the story (Galatians 4:31)

## CAST OUT LEGALISM AND LEGALISTS!

This sounds harsh, but the vitality and viability of the church are at stake. Legalism has a deadening effect on grace. Just as Hagar and Sarah could not live together under the same roof, law and grace never make good [bedfellows](#).

**But what does the Scripture say?** - In other words "What does God say?" because when Scripture speaks, God speaks! This is Paul's third appeal to Scripture (Gal 4:22, 27) in this last section (Gal 4:21-31).

In **Genesis** we read

Therefore she said to Abraham, **Drive out** (Heb - [garash](#) - thrust out - Piel Imperative; Lxx - [ekbállō](#) in [aorist imperative](#)) this maid and her son, for the son of this maid shall not be an heir with my son Isaac." 11 The matter distressed Abraham greatly because of his son. 12 But God said to Abraham, "Do not be distressed because of the lad and your maid; whatever Sarah tells you, listen to her, for through Isaac your descendants shall be named. (Genesis 21:10-12)

**CAST OUT THE BONDWOMAN AND HER SON** - **Cast out** is a command in the [aorist imperative](#) indicating "Do this now! Don't delay! It is urgent!" The implication to the Galatian believers is clear. **Cast out** the legalists! Separate from the legalists. They need to imitate Sarah who saw Ishmael mocking Isaac and said "Drive out this maid and her son" lest he become a joint heir! This sounds harsh at first glance, but Paul knows full well that legalism in any form blunts grace in every form and grieves and quenches the Holy Spirit (the Spirit of grace - Heb 10:29) and thus saps the power from genuine believers and from congregations. Beware of falling into the subtle trap of legalism, either of your own making or imposed by other seemingly "more spiritually mature appearing" individuals!

**Gangel** - By applying this quote from Genesis 21:10, Paul commands the Galatians to get rid of the legalizers. Their work does not have the authority or blessing of God. It must come to an end. The Galatians must choose to be free and act on that choice by expelling the Judaizers. (See context [Holman New Testament Commentary - Galatians, Ephesians](#))

**Cast out** (send, drive) (1544)([ekbállō](#) from **ek** = out + **bállō** = to cast, throw, drive) means to cast, throw out often with the idea of force (cf Acts 16:37+). **Ekballo** is the same verb used by the Septuagint translation of Ge 21:10.

**MacArthur** - As Sarah had Hagar and Ishmael cast out of Abraham's household (Gen. 21:10–14), so will their unbelieving descendants, those who live by works of the flesh, be cast out of God's household (cf. Matt. 7:22–23<sup>±</sup>; Mt 25:41). No one outside the covenant of grace will receive anything from God (ED: EXCEPT ETERNAL PUNISHMENT!). (See context in [The MacArthur New Testament Commentary](#))

**Constable** - This does not mean church leaders should excommunicate all legalistic Christians (**ED**: THE PEWS MIGHT BE A LITTLE "THIN" NEXT WEEK!). However, it might be wise to exclude promoters of legalism and nomism if they do not change their teaching.

**THOUGHT** - GOOD POINT BY DR CONSTABLE AND IT BEGS THE IMPORTANT QUESTION FOR ALL PASTORS AND ELDERS - ARE YOU SITTING IN ON THE TEACHING OF THOSE WHO ARE FEEDING YOUR FLOCK TO MAKE SURE THEY ARE TEACHING SOUND DOCTRINE? YOU WILL BE HELD ACCOUNTABLE AT THE BEMA SEAT (Heb 13:17<sup>±</sup>) SO DON'T SHY AWAY FROM THIS UNCOMFORTABLE TASK (2 Cor 5:10<sup>±</sup>). THE SPIRITUAL HEALTH OF YOUR BODY DEPENDS ON YOUR VIGILANCE. SEE PAUL'S STRONG WARNINGS - Acts 20:28-32+) I TAUGHT AT A BIBLE CENTERED CHURCH FOR YEARS

AND NO ELDERS EVER CAME TO CHECK ME OUT!

**Guzik** applies the idea of **cast out** to our practical Christian life - The point is that God told Abraham to send Hagar away. So also every Christian must send away the idea of relating to God on the principle of law, the principle of what we do for Him instead of what He has done for us in Jesus Christ. Significantly, Sarah could live with Hagar and Ishmael until the son of promise was born. Once Isaac was born, then Hagar and Ishmael had to go. In the same way, a person could relate to the law one way before the promise of the gospel was made clear in Jesus Christ. But now that it has been made clear, there is nothing to do but to cast out the bondwoman and her son. ([Galatians 4 – Heirs and Slaves, Grace and Law](#))

**Barton** - So what happens to Ishmael (the Jews) and Isaac (Christians) today? Paul answered forcefully. Judaism and Christianity could not coexist as paths to the same goal any more than Ishmael and Isaac could share Abraham's inheritance. Perhaps most ironic was Paul's bold clarification of this old story. The Jews had long held that this verse described God's rejection of the Gentiles. But Paul turned the tables: "You had it wrong. Jews and Gentiles are included together in God's inheritance when they become believers, or 'Isaacs.' Those who reject grace lose their share in the inheritance, whether unbelieving Jews or unrepentant Gentiles. (See context [Galatians](#))

Paul's warning in this passage might apply to the modern movement referred to as **Hebrews Roots Movement** - "Broadly speaking, followers of the HRM believe that all **believers in Christ are obligated to follow Jewish laws and practices from the books of Moses**. (ED: SOUNDS A BIT LIKE WHAT PAUL IS ARGUING AGAINST IN GALATIANS!) In some groups, extra-biblical rabbinic teachings and traditions are elevated (if not in official doctrinal beliefs then in practice) to the same level as Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. Although they often speak of keeping the "law," they are usually inconsistent in how this is understood and defined. [Read more...](#)"

- [Dangers of the Hebrew Roots Movement](#)
- [What is the Hebrew Roots movement?](#)
- [Bewitching Believers Through the Hebrew Roots Movement](#)
- [Hebrew Roots Movement - Watchman Fellowship](#)

**FOR THE SON OF THE BONDWOMAN SHALL NOT BE AN HEIR ([kleronomeo](#)) WITH THE SON OF THE FREE WOMAN - "Shall by no means"**—absolutely, positively, in no way. It's like trying to mix water and oil. You just can't put it together. Ishmael and his mother Hagar were expelled because Ishmael had no standing in God's eyes as the rightful heir of Abraham.

In Genesis 15:4 God spoke to Abraham saying "Then behold, the word of the LORD came to him, saying, "This man (Eliezer) will not be your heir; but one who will come forth from your own body, he shall be your **heir**." And by "his own body" the implication is from Sarah (for the two are "one flesh" Ge 2:24).

Compare Paul's teaching in Galatians 3:29+

And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's descendants, **heirs** according to promise.

**Guzik** - Ishmael was not necessarily a bad man or a cursed man. But neither was he blessed with the promise of inheriting the glorious covenant of God given to Abraham and his descendants. That was the inheritance of one heir – Isaac, the son of the freewoman. ([Galatians 4 – Heirs and Slaves, Grace and Law](#))

**Free** (unbound, unshackled)([1658](#)) see preceding use of [eleutheros](#) (See also [eleutheroo](#)) - Note Paul's emphasis on freedom using this word 5 times in his argument in Gal 4:21-31 (5 of 23 NT uses - Gal 4:22, 23, 26, 30, 31).

**Wiersbe** applies this section to a modern setting - Individual churches and Christians can make the same mistake the Galatians were making: **they can fail to cast out Hagar and Ishmael**. **Legalism** is one of the major problems among Christians today. We must keep in mind that legalism does not mean the setting of spiritual standards; it means worshiping these standards and thinking that we are spiritual because we obey them. It also means judging other believers on the basis of these standards. A person can refrain from smoking, drinking, and attending theaters, for example, and still not be spiritual. The Pharisees had high standards; yet they crucified Jesus. The old nature loves legalism, because it gives the old nature a chance to "look good." It costs very little for Ishmael not to do certain bad things, or to do certain religious deeds, just so long as he can remain Ishmael. For seventeen years Ishmael caused no trouble in the home; and then Isaac came along, and there was conflict. Legalism caters to Ishmael. The Christian who claims to be spiritual because of what he doesn't do is only fooling himself. It takes more than negations to make a positive, fruitful spiritual life. No doubt the Judaizers were attractive people. They carried credentials from religious authorities (2 Cor. 3:1). They had high standards and were careful in what they ate and drank. They were effective in making converts and liked to advertise their accomplishments (Gal. 4:17–18; 6:12–14). They had rules and standards to cover every area of life, making it easy for their followers to know who was "spiritual" and who was not. But the Judaizers were leading the people into bondage and defeat, not liberty and victory, and the people did not know the difference. In the closing chapters of this letter, Paul will point out the greatest

tragedy of legalism: it gives opportunity for the flesh to work. The old nature cannot be controlled by Law; eventually it has to break out—and when it does, watch out! This explains why legalistic religious groups often have fights and divisions (“ye fight and devour one another,” Gal. 5:15), and often are plagued with the defiling sins of the flesh (Gal. 5:19ff). While every church has its share of these problems, it is especially prominent in those groups where there is an atmosphere of legalism. When you invite Hagar and Ishmael to live with Sarah and Isaac, you are inviting trouble. Thank God, the Christian is set free from the curse of the Law and the control of the Law. “Cast out the bondwoman and her son.” It may pain us deeply, as it did Abraham; but it must be done. To attempt to mix Law and grace is to attempt the impossible. It makes for a frustrated, barren Christian life. But to live by grace, through faith, gives one a free and fulfilling Christian life. What is the secret? The Holy Spirit. And it is this secret that Paul will share in the closing “practical” chapters of the letter. Meanwhile, you and I need to beware lest Ishmael and Hagar have crept back into our lives. If they have—let us cast them out. (See context in [Be Free Galatians: Exchange Legalism for True Spirituality](#) or borrow [Be Free: An Expository Study of Galatians](#))

## Galatians 4:31 So then, brethren, we are not children of a bondwoman, but of the free woman

KJV Galatians 4:31 So then, brethren, we are not children of the bondwoman, but of the free.

- **we are not children of a bondwoman** Galatians 5:1,13; John 1:12,13; 8:36; Hebrews 2:14,15; 1 John 3:1,2
- Galatians 4 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries
- Galatians 4:21-5:1 - Don Anderson [Galatians Study 9; More Notes on Galatians Study 9](#)
- [Warren Wiersbe's sermon Born Free - Galatians 4](#) - one of the simplest and most profound expositions you will ever hear on Galatians 4!

The allegorical interpretation of the story (Galatians 4:24-30)

- a. The two mothers representing two covenants (Galatians 4:24a)
- b. The description of the two covenants (Galatians 4:24b-28)
  1. The one representing a covenant of bondage (Galatians 4:24b-25)
  2. The other representing a covenant of freedom (Galatians 4:26-28)
- c. The expulsion of the slave woman and her son (Galatians 4:29-30)

The conclusion from the story (Galatians 4:31)

### WE ARE CHILDREN OF THE FREE WOMAN

Paul ends the doctrinal section not at v31 but in v1 of the next chapter - a poor chapter break! As **W E Vine** and most other writers conclude "The close of the chapter at this point is unhappy, for 5:1 is obviously the conclusion of the argument developed in the preceding paragraph." So you come to the epitome of Paul's letter, to a verse that many commentators call the key verse in the book.

Galatians 5:1+ - It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore **keep standing firm** ([present imperative](#)) and **do not be subject** (KJV = entangled; [present imperative with a negative](#)) again to a yoke of slavery.

**Don Anderson** asks how do you keep from becoming entangled in a yoke of slavery. You substitute the yoke of the law for the yoke of grace. Matthew 11:28-30 Come unto me all ye who are weary and heavy laden and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you, [if you want a yoke] and learn of Me, for I am meek and lowly of heart. And you shall find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy, and My burden is light."

**So then** - Term of conclusion. Do you want the summary? Based on all Paul has taught, especially in Gal 4:21-30, he now draws this conclusion. **Vine** adds that "The apostle, having fully established the difference between law and grace, flesh and spirit, bondage and freedom, and their incompatibility one with another, now makes direct application of the inference to be drawn from the allegory, which is that the inheritance is given by promise to faith, and cannot be obtained by works done in obedience to law."

**Piper** - Paul concludes in verse 31 that we—that is, we who live by faith in the Son of God and don't rely on what we can achieve on our own—are not in the slave category but in the category of the free. ([Hagar and Slavery Vs. Sarah and Freedom](#))

**Brethren** (whether Jew or Gentile) ([adelphos](#) from **a** = denotes unity + **delphus** = a womb) Again Paul uses **brethren** to emphasize

the truth that the Galatian believers are "from the same womb" so to speak . "Adelphós generally denotes a fellowship of life based on identity of origin, e.g., members of the same family." And in this case they are in "Sarah's" family so to speak, the family entered by grace through faith in the promise of salvation in Christ. As noted above Paul has repeatedly assured his Galatian readers that they are his spiritual brethren (Gal 1:11, Gal 3:15, Gal 4:12, 28, 31, Gal 5:11, 13, Gal 6:1).

**Jack Arnold** - Every Christian is a spiritual Isaac and set free from the law. Those who are not believers are under the law and condemned by the law and are slaves to the law. Christians are spiritual children of Abraham through Sarah. We are inheritors of the covenants (Rom. 8:17 "Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ"). We are also set free in Christ to serve God (John 8:36 "So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.").([The Incompatibility of law and Grace](#))

**We are not children of a bondwoman**- Paul uses the first person plural "we" so includes himself with the Galatian brethren. They are one in Christ. And then he says "**we**" are not from the "lineage" of the **bondwoman (paidiske)**, Hagar. See the table below for the many negative results of being in the lineage of Hagar.

**But of the free woman** - **We** are of the "lineage" of Sarah (see table) who symbolizes the spiritual freedom believers have in Christ.

**Free** (unbound, unshackled)([1658](#)) see use of [eleutheros](#) (See also [eleutheroo](#)) - Note Paul's emphasis on freedom using this word 5 times in his argument in Gal 4:21-31 (5 of 23 NT uses - Gal 4:22, 23, 26, 30, 31).

### Don Anderson's Lessons from Galatians 4:21-5:1

1. LESSON #1: Be careful to consider the content and consequences before you sign-off in making a decision.
2. LESSON #2: The safest thing we can do when God's promise is left unfulfilled is to wait.
3. LESSON #3: Abraham and Sarah tried to help God fulfill His promise to them and that created the problem.
4. LESSON #4: God does not need our help in fulfilling His promises to us.
5. LESSON #5: The law gives birth to bondage, the promise gives birth to freedom.
6. LESSON #6: When we come to know Jesus Christ as Savior we become children of promise.
7. LESSON #7: The flesh and the Spirit will always be in conflict.
8. LESSON #8: Are you in bondage to anyone or anything at this time?
9. LESSON #9: Have you been set free in Jesus Christ?
10. LESSON #10: The yoke of the law leads to bondage. The yoke of the Lord is easy.
11. LESSON #11: It is for freedom that Christ has set us free.
12. LESSON #12: "Keep on standing firm therefore and stop becoming entangled again in a yoke of bondage" (Galatians 5:1).

### Summary of the Contrasts Galatians 4:21-31

HAGAR	SARAH
Slave	Free
Ishmael	Isaac
Son of bondwoman	Son of free woman
Born into slavery	Born as a free man
The way of the flesh	The way of promise
Born because of work, effort	Born by promise of God
The natural, fleshly way	The miraculous way
Way of religious self-effort	Way of faith
Works righteousness	Imputed righteousness
Way of legalism	Way of grace
Symbolic of only natural birth	Symbolic of spiritual birth
Trust in their own works	Trust in work of Jesus



Representative of the Covenant of the Law (Mosaic Covenant)	Representative of the Covenant of Grace (Abraham > New Covenant)
Present Jerusalem Represents Legalism	Jerusalem Above Represents Life in the Spirit
Leads to Slavery Eternal Death	Leads to Freedom Eternal Life
Coming from earthly Jerusalem	Coming from heavenly Jerusalem
Persecuting	Persecuted
Inherited Nothing	Inherited Everything
Relationship based on Law keeping	Relationship based on Trusting God

**Jack Arnold** tells the following story - God's grace is sufficient to save us from all the past sins we ever did before we accepted Christ—lying, hate, pride, pre-marital sex, extra-marital sex, homosexuality, lesbianism, drunkenness drug abuse, materialism, self-centeredness, divorce or whatever. Any sin done before conversion to Christ can and will be forgiven by Christ.

John Newton, a late Puritan preacher, was raised in a Christian home by a godly mother who wanted him to be a preacher. His father was a godless, rough and tough sailor who wanted his son to go to sea. Until he was six, John's mother filled his mind with the Bible and prayed for him; then she suddenly died. At eleven, John went to sea with his father.

When John was seventeen, he met and fell in love with 13-year-old Polly Catlett, but she was too young to marry. He went back to the sea, but as a sailor he lived a very immoral life. He was a slave-trader and would rape black women chained in the hold of the slave ships. He participated in every sordid kind of activity and kept a native mistress. John used and abused all races of women for his pleasure and his own words were, "I rejoiced . . . that I now might be as abandoned as I pleased, without restraint . . . I not only sinned with a high hand myself but made it my study to tempt and seduce others upon every occasion."

By age twenty-one, John had a foul mouth and a debauched life, being addicted to alcohol. He hated Christians and mocked anyone who claimed to be a follower of Christ. Then somehow a copy of Thomas a Kempis' book The Imitation of Christ, fell into his hands and he read these words: "Life is short and of uncertain continuance. Today the man is vigorous, and tomorrow he is cut down, withered and gone." John could not escape these words but still went on with his wild living.

One night, while John was at the helm of the ship, a terrible storm hit and it appeared the ship would go down and all drown. John was scared and Bible verses his mother taught him and the remembrance of her prayers for him flashed through his mind. John did every human thing to save the ship and then cried out, "If this will not do, the Lord have mercy on us." With death imminent, Newton acknowledged God and asked for mercy. After the storm, he began to read the new Testament and understood that Christ died for sinners, but was not sure Christ died for him because John felt himself the chief of sinners. Somewhere in his study of the New Testament, John Newton received Christ as his Savior and Lord, calling upon grace to save him.

God not only forgives past sins but also present sins—sins that we do as Christians. As Christians, we may have done some dumb and horrible sins and the Devil says to us, "You can't be forgiven. You have gone so deep into sin, you could never be forgiven by God. You have committed the unforgivable sin!" When this happens, law and the flesh condemns us and we feel like we must do something to make amends to get right with God, to somehow pay for our own sins, to do penance. These are true feelings but they are only feelings. The Bible says, "Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus." (Rom. 8:1). This is the truth of God's Word. Feelings have nothing to do with faith. Faith is taking God at His Word, no matter how we feel or think. God's Word is truth and everyone else a liar.

At twenty-three, John Newton was a saved man with a promising future. He returned to England and established a deep relationship with Polly, his future wife. He was alive and growing in Christ. Then John decided to go on another slave run to Africa. At this point, he was not yet convinced that slavery was wrong.

After a few weeks, when the slave ship landed on Africa's west coast, John had a severe backsliding in his relationship with Christ. He stopped reading the Bible, became careless in prayer and had no Christian fellowship. Trying to resist the temptation to rape slave women, he could not. Off the ship he had a black mistress for his pleasure. Newton wrote, "I was almost as bad as before."

Then Newton was struck with a terrible disease, which was surely discipline from God. He was under deep conviction and had

betrayed Christ. He wondered if Christ would forgive him for such gross sins.

While weak and almost delirious, he turned to Christ for mercy once again. John said, "I made no more resolves, but cast myself upon the Lord to do with me as He would please." John Newton received forgiveness in grace. He experienced peace in grace. Newton later wrote, "Though I have grieved His Spirit and foolishly wandered from him since, his powerful grace has preserved me from such black declensions as this I have recorded."

Grace and law cannot co-exist. We cannot be under grace and law for salvation and Christian living (sanctification). Grace is the key to living a positive life for Christ (Gal. 3:3). Grace is not license to sin. Grace is the way to true service for Christ. Grace gives us a deep appreciation for our God who saved us, is saving us and will save us by grace through faith alone.

John Newton, after really grasping the meaning of grace, wrote the most famous Christian hymn of all time:

Amazing grace! How sweet the sound,  
That saved a wretch like me!  
I once was lost,  
But now am found;  
Was blind, but now I see.

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## Are You Free?

Bible in a Year: Exodus 25-26; Matthew 20:17-34

We are not children of the bondwoman but of the free. — Galatians 4:31

Today's Scripture: Galatians 4:21-31

Kizzy Kinte didn't have a chance. The daughter of Kunta Kinte in Alex Haley's epic book *Roots* wanted to slip the bonds of slavery and live free, as her ancestors had done in Africa. But she couldn't. She was born of a slave woman, Bell Kinte, and in those terrible days of bondage, she was destined to live as a slave.

Kizzy's parentage-over which she had no control-dictated her destiny.

That sounds a little like Galatians 4:31, where Paul used an analogy of an Old Testament story to help us understand bondage and freedom. Alluding to the story of Abraham, Sarah, and Hagar, Paul explained the difference between the child of a bondwoman (Hagar) and the child of a freewoman (Sarah). Only the child of the freewoman could enjoy an inheritance; the other was destined to bondage.

Here's the point: each of us-male or female, Jew or Gentile, black or white, rich or poor-can share in God's inheritance. All who trust in Jesus as Savior become "not children of the bondwoman but of the free" (v.31). We are released from the bondage of the law of God and offered God's grace instead. And our inheritance is freedom-absolute freedom in Christ.

Has God's grace made you free? By Dave Branon ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

Reflect & Pray

[Out of my bondage, sorrow, and night.](#)

Jesus, I come, Jesus, I come;  
Into Thy freedom, gladness, and light,  
Jesus, I come to Thee.  
-Sleeper

True freedom is found in bondage to Christ.